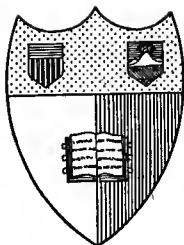




THE ORCHID

ROBERT GRANT



Cornell University Library
Ithaca, New York

FROM

Mrs. A. D. White

To renew this book copy the call No. and give to the librarian.

JUN 30 1979

JUN 8 1988

HOME USE RULES

All Books subject to recall

All borrowers must register in the library to borrow books for home use.

All books must be returned at end of college year for inspection and repairs.

Limited books must be returned within the four week limit and not renewed.

Students must return all books before leaving town. Officers should arrange for the return of books wanted during their absence from town.

Volumes of periodicals and of pamphlets are held in the library as much as possible. For special purposes they are given out for a limited time.

Borrowers should not use their library privileges for the benefit of other persons.

Books of special value and gift books, when the giver wishes it, are not allowed to circulate.

Readers are asked to report all cases of books marked or mutilated.

Do not deface books by marks and writing.



Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

Cornell University Library

PS 1762.O6

The orchid(a novel)by Robert Grant; Illu



3 1924 021 976 950

THE ORCHID



ALONZO KIMBALL

"I ask you to drink to the happiness of the loveliest woman in creation."

THE ORCHID

BY
ROBERT GRANT

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALONZO KIMBALL

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK ::::::::::: 1905

W E
CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

A 458938

Copyright, 1905, by
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, April, 1905

TROW DIRECTORY
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY
NEW YORK

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>"I ask you to drink to the happiness of the loveliest woman in creation"</i>	Frontispiece
<i>The smile of incredulity which curved her lips betrayed entertainment also</i>	Facing page 108
<i>"I should not permit it!" he thundered. "I should go to law; I should appeal to the courts"</i>	156
<i>A huge machine of bridal white . . . tore around the corner</i>	222

THE ORCHID

I

IT was generally recognized that Lydia Arnold's perceptions were quicker than those of most other people. She was alert in grasping the significance of what was said to her; her face clearly revealed this. She had the habit of deliberating just an instant before responding, which marked her thought; and when she spoke, her words had a succinct definiteness of their own. The quality of her voice arrested attention. The intonation was finished yet dry: finished in that it was well modulated; dry in that it was void of enthusiasm.

THE ORCHID

Yet Lydia was far from a grave person. She laughed readily and freely, but in a minor key, which was only in keeping with her other attributes of fastidiousness. Her mental acuteness and conversational poise were accounted for at Westfield—the town within the limits of which dwelt the colony of which she was a member—by the tradition that she had read everything, or, more accurately, that she had been permitted to read everything while still a school-girl.

Her mother, a beautiful, nervous invalid—one of those mysterious persons whose peculiarities are pigeon-holed in the memories of their immediate families—had died in Lydia's infancy. Her amiable but self-indulgent father had been too easy-going or too obtuse to follow the details of her home-training. He had taken refuge

THE ORCHID

from qualms or perplexities by providing a governess, a well-equipped, matronly foreigner, from whom she acquired a correct French accent and composed deportment, both of which were now marks of distinction. Mlle. Demorest would have been the last woman to permit a *jeune fille* to browse unreservedly in a collection of miscellaneous French novels. But Lydia saw no reason why she should inform her preceptress that, having entered her father's library in search of "Ivanhoe" and the "Dutch Republic," she had gone there later to peruse the works of Flaubert, Octave Feuillet, and Guy de Maupassant. Why, indeed? For, to begin with, was she not an American girl, and free to do as she chose? And then again the evolution was gradual; she had reached this stage of culture by degrees. She read everything

THE ORCHID

which the library contained—poetry, history, philosophy, fiction—and having exhausted these resources, she turned her attention outside, and became an omnivorous devourer of current literature.

Before her “coming-out” party she was familiar with all the “up-to-date” books, and had opinions on many problems, sexual and otherwise, though be it said she was an eminently proper young person in her language and behavior, and her knowingness, so far as appeared, was merely intellectual. Early in the day her father’s scrutiny was forever dazzled by the assuring discovery that she was immersed in Scott. Mr. Arnold had been told by some of his contemporaries that the rising generation did not read Sir Walter, a heresy so damnable that when he found his daughter pale with interest over the sor-

THE ORCHID

rows of the "Bride of Lammermoor," he jumped to the conclusion that her literary taste was conservative, and gave no more thought to this feature of her education. Presently he did what he considered the essentially paternal thing—introduced her to the social world through the medium of a magnificent ball, which taxed his income though he had been preparing for it for a year or two. As one of a bevy of pretty, innocent-looking maidens in white tulle, Lydia attracted favorable comment from the outset by her piquant expression and stylish figure. But shortly after the close of her first season she was driven into retirement by her father's death, and when next she appeared on the horizon, sixteen months later, it was as a spirited follower of the hounds belonging to the Westfield Hunt Club.

THE ORCHID

On the crisp autumn day when this story opens, the members of that energetic body were eagerly discussing the interesting proposition whether or not Miss Lydia Arnold was going to accept Herbert Maxwell as a husband. This was the universal query, and the point had been agitated for the past six weeks with increasing curiosity. The hunting season was now nearing its close, and the lover was still setting a tremendous pace, but none of the closest feminine friends of the young woman in question appeared to have inside information. Even her bosom friend, Mrs. Walter Cole, as she joined the meet that morning, could only say in answer to inquiries that Lydia was mum as an oyster.

“I suppose the reflection that the offspring might resemble Grandma Maxwell

THE ORCHID

tends to counteract the glamour of the four millions," remarked one of the group, Gerald Marcy, a middle-aged bachelor with a partiality for cynical sallies—also an ex-master of the hounds and one of the veterans of the colony. He was mounted on a solid roan hunter slightly but becomingly grizzled like himself. Thereupon he gave a twist to his mustache, as he was apt to do after uttering what he thought was a good thing. Most of the Westfield Hunt Club were clean-shaven young men who regarded a mustache as a hirsute superfluity. The nucleus of the club had been formed twenty years previous—in the late seventies—at which time it was the fashion to wear hair on the face, but of the small band of original members some had grown too stout or too shaky to hunt, most had families which forbade them to run

THE ORCHID

the risk of breaking their necks, and others were dead.

Mrs. Cole's reply was uttered so that only Marcy heard it. Perhaps she feared to shock the smooth-shaven younger men, for, though she prided herself on her complete sophistication in regard to the world and its ways, one evidence of it was that she suited her conversation to the person with whom she was talking. There are points of view which a young matron can discuss with a middle-aged bachelor which might embarrass or be misinterpreted by less experienced males. So she caused her pony to bound a little apart before she said to Marcy, who followed her:

"I doubt very much if children of her own are included in Lydia's scheme of life."

Mrs. Cole was a bright-eyed, vivacious

THE ORCHID

woman, who talked fast and cleverly. She was fond of making paradoxical remarks, and of defending her theses stoutly. She glanced sideways at her companion to observe the effect of this animadversion, then, bending, patted the neck of her pal-frey caressingly. She was herself the mother of two chubby infants, and, out of deference to domestic claims, she no longer followed the hounds, but simply took a morning spin to the meets on a safe hack.

Marcy smiled appreciatively. As a man of the world he felt bound to do this, yet as a man of the world he felt shocked at the hypothesis. Race suicide was in his eyes a cardinal sin compared with which youthful indiscretions resulting from hot blood appeared trifling and normal. Besides, it was deliberate rebellion against the

THE ORCHID

vested rights of man. This latter consideration gave the cue to his slightly dogged answer.

"I rather think that Herbert Maxwell would have something to say about that."

Mrs. Cole surveyed him archly, meditating a convincing retort, when suddenly a new group of riders appeared over the crest of an intervening hill. "Here they are!" she cried with a gusto which proclaimed that the opportunity for subtle confabulation on the point at issue was at an end.

The newcomers, all ardent hunting spirits—Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Cunningham, Miss Peggy Blake, Miss Lydia Arnold, Guy Perry and Herbert Maxwell—came speeding forward at a brisk gallop. Mrs. Cunningham—May Cunningham—was a short, dumpy woman, amiable and

THE ORCHID

popular, but hard featured, as though she had burned the candle in social comings and goings in her youth, which indeed was the case. But since her marriage she had by way of settling down fixed her energies on cross-country riding, and was familiarly known as the mother of the hunt. She had an excellent seat. She and her husband, a burly sportsman whose ruling passion was to reduce his weight below two hundred pounds, and whose predilection for gaudy effects in waistcoats and stocks always pushed the prevailing fashion hard, were prime movers in the Westfield set. They had no children, and, as Mrs. Cole once said, it sometimes seemed as though the hounds took the place of them.

Miss Peggy Blake was a breezy Amazon, comely, long-limbed and enthusiastic, of many adjectives but simple soul, whose

THE ORCHID

hair was apt to tumble down at inopportune moments, but who stuck at nothing which promised fresh physical exhilaration. Guy Perry, a young broker who had made a fortune in copper stocks, was one of her devoted swains. But dashing as she rode, her carriage lacked Lydia Arnold's distinction and witchery. Indeed, that slight, dainty young person seemed a part of the animal, so gracefully and jauntily did she follow the movements of her rangy, spirited thoroughbred. When Gerald Marcy exclaimed fervently, "By Jove, but she rides well!" no one of the awaiting group was doubtful as to whom he meant.

Keeping as close to his Dulcinea as he could, but not quite abreast, came Herbert Maxwell, a rather lumbering equestrian. Fashion had led him, the previous season,

THE ORCHID

as a young man with great possessions, to follow the hounds, but sedately, as became a somewhat sober novice. Love now spurred him to take the highest stone walls, and for the purpose he had bought a couple of famous hunters. He had long ago dismissed both fear and caution, and had eyes only for the nape of Miss Arnold's neck as they sped over hill and dale. Twice in the last six weeks he had come a cropper, as the phrase is, and been cut up a bit, but he still rode valiantly, bent on running the risk of a final tumble which would break not his ribs but his heart. In everyday life he appeared large and above the average height, with reddish-brown hair and eyebrows and a somewhat grave countenance—rather a nondescript young man, but entirely unobjectionable; the sort of personality which, as Lydia's friends were

THE ORCHID

saying, a clever woman could mould into a solid if not ornamental social pillar.

For Herbert Maxwell was a new man. That is, the parents of the members of the Westfield Hunt Club remembered his father as a dealer in furniture, selling goods in his own store, a red-visaged round-faced, stubby looking citizen with a huge standing collar gaping at the front. Though he had grown rich in the process, settled in the fashionable quarter of the city and sent his boy to college in order to make desirable friends and get a good education, it could not be denied that he smelt of varnish metaphorically if not actually, and that Herbert was, so to speak, on the defensive from a social point of view. Everybody's eye was on him to see that he did not make some "break," and inasmuch as he was commonly, if patronizingly,

THE ORCHID

spoken of as "a very decent sort of chap," it may be taken for granted that he had managed to escape serious criticism. His sober manner was partly to be accounted for by his determination to keep himself well in hand, which had been formed ten years previous, during his Freshman year, when one of his classmates, to the manner born, informed him in a moment of frankness that he was too loud-mouthed for success.

This had been the turning-point in his career; he had been toning down ever since; he had been cultivating reserve, checking all temptations toward extravagance of speech, deportment or dress, and, in short, had become convincingly repressed—that is, up to the hour of his infatuation for Lydia Arnold. Since then he had let himself go, yet not indecorously,

THE ORCHID

and with due regard to the proprieties. All the world loves a lover, and to the Westfield Hunt Club Herbert Maxwell's kicking over the bars of colorless conventionality appeared both pardonable and refreshing, especially as it was recognized that the manifestations of his ardor, though unmistakable, had not been lacking in taste. The sternest censors of society had not the heart to sneer at the possessor of four millions because the entertainments which he gave in his lady love's honor were more sumptuous than the occasion demanded, and that in his solicitude to keep up with her on the hunting field he was an easy victim to the horse-dealers. Before the bar of nice judgment it was tacitly admitted that he appeared to better advantage than if he had ambled after his goddess with the lacklustre indifference which some of his betters

THE ORCHID

were apt to affect. It takes one to the manner born to be listless in love and yet prevail; and so it was that Maxwell's reversion to breakneck manners had given a pleasant thrill to this fastidious colony.

Gay greetings and felicitations on the beauty of the day for hunting purposes were exchanged between the new-comers and their friends. The men in their red coats had a word of gallantry or chaff for every woman. New equestrians appeared approaching from diverse directions, while suddenly from the kennels a few rods distant issued a barking, snuffing pack of eager hounds, conducted by Kenneth Post, the master, whose expansive high white stock and shining black leather boots proclaimed that he took his functions seriously. This was a red-letter day for him, as he had

THE ORCHID

invited the hunt to breakfast with him at the club-house after the run.

Lydia, on her arrival, had guided her thoroughbred to the other side of Mrs. Cole so deftly that her admirer was shut out from immediate pursuit. At a glance from her the two women's heads bent close together in scrutiny of some disarrangement in her riding-habit.

"Fanny," she whispered, "I've done it."

"Lydia! When did it happen?"

"Last evening. I've given him permission to announce it at the breakfast."

"My dear, I'm just thrilled. You've kept us all guessing."

"I've heard that the betting was even," answered Lydia with dry complacency. The intimation that she had kept the world in the dark was evidently agreeable. "I wished you to know first of all."

THE ORCHID

"That was lovely of you. And how clever to escape the bore of writing all those hateful notes! That was just like you, Lydia."

"I know a girl who wrote two hundred, and the day they were ready to be sent out changed her mind. I don't wish to run the risk. Here comes Mr. Marcy."

Fannie Cole gave her hand an ecstatic squeeze and they lifted their heads to meet the common enemy, man. It was time to start, and he was solicitous lest something were wrong with Miss Arnold's saddle girths.

"Beauty in distress?" he murmured with a tug at his mustache. Marcy had his commonplace saws, like most of us.

Mrs. Cole was opening her mouth to reassure him on that score when she was forestalled by Lydia.

THE ORCHID

"That's a question, Mr. Marcy, which can be more easily answered a year or two hence."

Marcy bowed low in his saddle. "At your pleasure, of course. I did not come to pry." At his best Marcy had quick perceptions and could put two and two together. He was assisted to the divination that something was in the wind by catching sight at the moment of Herbert Maxwell's countenance. That worthy had been blocked in his progress by pretty Mrs. Baxter, who, having resented his attempt to squeeze past her by the following remark, had barred his way with her horse's flank.

"We all know where you are heading, Mr. Maxwell, but as a punishment for endeavoring to shove me aside you must pay toll by talking to me for a little."

THE ORCHID

The culprit had started and stared like one awakened in his sleep, and stammered his apologies to his laughing tormentor. But while she kept him at bay, his eyes could not help straying beyond her toward the woman of his heart, and it was their peculiar expression which drew from Marcy the remark which he referred to later as an inspiration.

"It's not exactly pertinent to the subject, Miss Arnold, but Herbert Maxwell has the look this morning of having seen the Holy Grail."

Lydia calmly turned her graceful head in the direction indicated, then facing her interrogator, said oracularly after a pause: "The wisest men are liable to see false visions. But provided they are happy, does it really matter, Mr. Marcy?"

Whereupon, without waiting for a re-

THE ORCHID

sponse to this Delphic utterance, she tapped her thoroughbred with her hunting crop and cantered forward to take her place in the van of those about to follow the hounds.

II

MRS. WALTER COLE was glad to find herself alone after the hounds were off. Without waiting to be joined by any women, who, like herself, had come to see the start and intended to jog on the flank, cut corners and so be in at the finish, she put her hack at a brisk canter in the direction of a neighboring copse, seeking a bridle-path through the woods which would bring her out not far from the club-house after a pleasant circuit. She was indeed thrilled, and, inasmuch as she must remain tongue-tied, she could not bear the society of her sex, and sought solitude and reverie. And so Lydia had done it. Intimate as they were, she had been kept guessing like the

THE ORCHID

rest, and up to the moment of the disclosure of the absorbing confidence she had never been able to feel sure whether Lydia would or not. Lydia married! And if so? She would have been sure to marry some day; and to marry an entirely reputable and presentable man with four millions was, after all, an eminently normal proceeding.

Yet somehow it was one thing to think of her as liable to marry, another to recognize that she was actually engaged. It was the concrete reality of Lydia Arnold married and settled which set Mrs. Cole's nimble brain spinning with speculative, sympathetic interest as the dry autumn leaves cracked under the hoofs of her walking horse, to which she had given a loose rein. Lydia had such highly evolved ideas of her own; and how would they accord

THE ORCHID

with the connubial relation? Not that she knew these ideas in specific detail, for Lydia had never hinted at a system; but from time to time in the relaxations of spirit intimacy there had been droppings—flashes—innuendoes, which had set the world in a new light, blazed the path as it were for a new feminine philosophy, and which to a clever woman like herself, fastened securely by domestic ties to the existing order of things, were alike entertaining and suggestive. Mrs. Cole drew a deep breath, as once more recurred to her sundry remarks which had provided her already that morning with material for causing no less experienced a person than Mr. Gerald Marcy to prick up his ears. She and her husband had set up housekeeping on a humble scale—almost poverty from the Westfield point of view—and she

THE ORCHID

remembered the contemplative silence more eloquent than words when, three years previous, hungry for enthusiasm, she had taken Lydia into the nursery to admire her first-born. All her other unmarried friends had gone into ecstasies over baby, as became true daughters of Eve. Lydia, after long scrutiny, had simply said:

“Well, dear, I suppose you think it’s worth while.”

Thus wondering how Lydia would deal with the problems of matrimony, and almost bursting with her secret, Mrs. Cole walked her horse until the novelty of the revelation had worn off a little. When she left the covert at a point suggested by the baying of the dogs, she caught a glimpse of the hunt on the opposite side of the horizon to that where it had disappeared from view. Assuming that the finish was likely

THE ORCHID

to occur in the meadow lands in the rear of the club-house, she proceeded to gallop briskly across the intervening valley in the hope of anticipating the hounds. Time, however, had slipped away faster than she supposed. At all events, when she was still some little distance from the field which was her destination she beheld the hounds scampering down the slope from the woodlands beyond. A moment later the air resounded with their yelpings as they attacked the raw meat provided as a reward for the deceit imposed on them by the anise-seed scent. Close on their heels came the Master and the leading spirits of the chase, and by the time Mrs. Cole arrived the entire hunt had put in an appearance or been accounted for, and was proceeding leisurely toward the club, gayly comparing notes on the incidents of the run. There

THE ORCHID

had been amusing casualties. Douglas Hale's horse, having failed to clear a ditch, had tossed its ponderous rider over its head—happily without serious consequences—and in the act of floundering out had planted a shower of mud on the person of Guy Perry, so that the ordinarily spruce young broker was a sight to behold.

The Westfield Hunt Club was one of a number of social colonies in the eastern section of the country which in the course of the last twenty-five years have come into being and flourished. Three principal causes have contributed to their evolution: the increase in wealth and in the number of people with comfortable means, the growing partiality for outdoor athletic sports, and the tendency on the part of those who could afford two homes to escape

THE ORCHID

the stuffy air of the cities during as many months as possible, and on the part of young couples with only one home to set up their household gods in the country. Our ancestors of consideration were apt to hug the cities and towns. Their summer excursions to the seaside rarely began before July, and fathers of families preferred to be safe at home before the brewing of the equinoxial storm. But the towering bricks and mortar and increasing pressure of urban life have little by little prolonged the season of emancipation in the fresh air, and spacious modern villas, with many bath-rooms and all the modern improvements, have supplanted the primitive cottages of the former generation, just as the rank fields of gay butter-cups and daisies have given place to velvety lawns, extensive stables, and terraced Italian gardens.

THE ORCHID

The Westfield Hunt Club was primarily a sporting colony—that is, outdoor sport was its ruling passion. Cross-country riding had been its first love, at a time when the free-born farmers of the neighborhood looked askance at the introduction of what they considered dudish British innovations. Yet it promptly offered hospitality to the rising interest in sports of every kind, and the devotees of tennis, polo and golf found there ample accommodation for the pursuit of their favorite pastimes.

At the date of our narrative the interest in tennis was at a minimum; polo, always a sport in which none but the prosperous few can afford to shine, had only a small following; but golf was at the height of its fashionable ascendancy. Everybody was playing golf, not only the young and supple, the middle-

THE ORCHID

aged and persevering, but every man however clumsy and every woman however feeble or gawky who felt constrained to follow the latest social fad as a law of his or her being. Every links in the country was crowded with agitated followers of the royal and ancient game, who bought clubs galore in the constant hope of acquiring distance and escaping bunkers, and who were alternately pitied and bullied by the attendant army of caddies, sons of the small farmers whose views regarding British innovations had been substantially modified by the accompanying shower of American quarters and dimes.

Indeed, it may be said that the attitude of the country-side regarding all the doings of the colony had undergone a gradual but complete change. This was due to the largess and social tact of the

THE ORCHID

new-comers. To begin with, they were eager to pay roundly for the privilege of trampling down crops and riding through fences. Having thus put matters on a liberal pecuniary basis, they endeavored to translate grim forbearance for business reasons into a more genial frame of mind by horse shows with popular features, and country fairs where fat prizes for large vegetables and free dinners bore testimony to the good-will of the promoters. A ball at which the pink-coated male members of the club danced with the farmers' wives and daughters, and Mrs. Andrew Cunningham, with a corps of fair assistants, stood up with the country swains while they cut pigeon-wings in utter gravity, was an annual sop to local sensibilities and a bid for popular regard. Little by little the neighborhood had

THE ORCHID

thawed. Surely the new-comers must be good fellows, if Westfield's tax receipts were growing in volume without demur, and there was constantly increasing employment for the people not only on the public roads, but in carpentry, plumbing, and all sorts of jobs on the new places, besides a splendid market for their sheep and chickens and garden produce. From Westfield's standpoint the ways of some of these individuals with "money to burn" were puzzling, but if grown-up folk could find amusement in chasing a little white ball across country, the common sense of Westfield could afford to be indulgent under existing circumstances.

The quarters to which the hunting party now repaired in gay spirits was, as its appearance indicated, a farm-house of ancient aspect, which had been altered over

THE ORCHID

to begin with, and been amplified later to suit the greater requirements of the club. The rambling effect of the low-studded rooms had been enhanced by sundry wings and annexes, the result of which was far from convincing architecturally, but which suggested a quaint cosiness very satisfying and precious to the original members. Progress, reform, innovation—call it what you will—was already rife in the colony itself, a case, it would seem, of refining gold or painting the lily. One had only to observe the more elaborate character of the new houses to be convinced of this. The pioneers had been content to leave the original structures standing, and to do them over with new plumbing and new wall-papers. Then it occurred to some one richer than his fellows, or whose wife remembered the scriptural admonition

THE ORCHID

against putting new wine into old bottles, to pull down an ancient farm-house and replace it with a comely modern villa. The villa was simple and an ornament to the landscape, and though the wiseacres shook their heads and described it as an entering wedge, the general consensus of the colony declared it an improvement. Others followed suit, and within two years there was a dozen of these pleasant-looking homes in the vicinity.

But latterly a new tendency had manifested itself. Three sportsmen of large possessions, who had decided to spend most of the year in the country, had erected establishments on an imposing scale, very spacious, very stately, with extensive stables and all the appurtenances befitting a magnificent country-seat. As the owners were building simultaneously,

THE ORCHID

there had naturally been some rivalry to produce the most imposing result. The effect of these splendors was already perceptible. Others with large possessions were talking of invading Westfield, land was rising in value, and it cost the colony more to entertain. Most terrible of all to the pioneers, there was unconcealed whispering that the club-house must come down and be replaced by a convenient modern structure; that more commodious stables were needed; that the golf links should be materially lengthened, and that both the annual dues and the membership must be increased to help provide for these improvements. As a consequence most of the old members were irate on the subject, and Gerald Marcy was quoted as having said that to do away with the original quarters would be an act of sacrilege.

THE ORCHID

"Are not the rafters sacred from time-honored association?" he had inquired in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Principally with champagne," had been Guy Perry's comment on this fervent apostrophe. Youth is fickle and partial to change. Guy voiced the sentiment of the younger element in craving modern comfort and conveniences, which could be obtained by demolishing the old rattle-trap, as the less conservative styled it, and putting up a clean, commodious, attractive-looking club-house. Guy himself had given out that his firm was ready to underwrite the bonds necessary to finance all the proposed changes. Thus it will be seen that at this period social conditions at Westfield were in a condition of ferment and change, although the colony was still youthful. Yet differences of opinion were

THE ORCHID

merged on this particular morning in the enjoyment of sport and the crisp autumn weather. The returning members of the hunt found at the club-house some of the golf players of both sexes, who had been invited by the master of the hounds to join them at breakfast, and it was not long before the company was seated at table.

Everyone was hungry, and everyone seemed in good spirits. Conversation flowed spontaneously, or, in other words, everyone seemed to be talking at once. The host, Kenneth Post, finding himself free for a moment from all responsibilities save to see that the waiters did their duty, inasmuch as the woman on either side of him was exchanging voluble pleasantries with someone else, cast a contented glance around the mahogany. Personal badinage, as he well knew, was the current coin of his

THE ORCHID

set. The occasion on which it was absent or flagged was regarded as dull. Subjects, ideas, theories bored his companions—especially the women—as a social pastime. What they liked was to talk about people, to gossip of one another's affairs or failings when separated, to discharge at one another keen but good-humored chaff when they met. Naturally the host was gratified by the universal chatter, for obviously his friends were enjoying themselves. Nevertheless there seemed to be something in the air not to be explained by the exhilaration resulting from the run or by cocktails before luncheon. As he mused, his eyes fell on Herbert Maxwell and he wondered. That faithful but solid equestrian was commonly reticent and rather inert in speech, but now, with face aglow, he was bandying words with Miss Peggy Blake and another

THE ORCHID

young woman at the same time. Post remembered that he had seen him take three drinks at the bar, which for him was an innovation. The Master felt knowing, and instinctively his eyes sought the countenance of Miss Arnold. It was demure and furnished no clue to her admirer's mood, unless a faint smile which suggested momentary content was to be regarded as an indication.

While Kenneth Post was thus observing his guests he was recalled to more active duties by Mrs. Andrew Cunningham, who, in her capacity of mother of the hunt, had been placed at his right hand. Having finished her soft-shell crab and emptied her quiver of timely shafts upon the young man at her other elbow, she had turned to her host for a familiar chat on the topic at that time nearest her heart.

“I hope you're on our side, Mr. Post—

THE ORCHID

that you are opposed to the new order of things which would drive every one except millionaires out of Westfield? Tell me that you intend to vote against pulling down this dear old sanctuary. It's a rookery, if you like, but that's its charm. Will anything they build take the place of it in our affections?"

"We've had lots of good times here, of course, and I'm as fond of the old place as anyone, but—the fact is, Mrs. Cunningham, I'm in a difficult position. The younger men count on me in a way; it was they who chose me master, and in a sense I'm their representative; so——"

He paused, and allowed the ellipsis to convey an intimation of what he might be driven to by the rising generation, to which he was more nearly allied by age than to the older faction.

Mrs. Cunningham looked up in his face

THE ORCHID

in doughty expostulation. Her round cheeks reminded him of ruddy but slightly withered crab-apples. "The time has come for Andrew and me to pull up stakes, I fear. The life here'll be spoiled. Everything is going up in price—land, servants, marketing, horses, assessments."

"That's the case everywhere, isn't it?" Kenneth was an easy-going fellow, and preferred smiling acquiescence, but when taken squarely to task he had the courage of his convictions. "The fellows wish more comforts and facilities. There are next to no bathing accommodations at present, and everything is cramped, and—and really it's so, if one looks dispassionately—fusty."

"I adore the fustiness."

"Wait until you see the improvements. Mark my words, six months after they are

THE ORCHID

finished nothing would induce you to return to the old order of things. We're sure of the money; the loan has been underwritten by a syndicate."

Mrs. Cunningham groaned. "Exactly. So has everything in Westfield, to judge by appearances. The palaces erected by the Douglas Hales, the Marburys, and Mr. Gordon Wallace have given the death-blow to simple ways, and we shall soon be in the grip of a plutocracy. The original band of gentlemen farmers who came here to get close to nature and to one another are undone, have become back numbers, and"—she lowered her voice to suit the exigencies—"in case Lydia Arnold accepts Herbert Maxwell, she will not rest until she has something more imposing and gorgeous than anything yet."

Kenneth eagerly took advantage of the

THE ORCHID

opportunity to divert the emphasis to that ever-interesting speculation.

“Have you any light to throw on the burning problem?” he asked.

The mother of the hunt shook her head. “Mrs. Cole said to me only yesterday, ‘I’ve tried to make up my mind for her by putting myself in her place and endeavoring to decide what conclusion I, with her characteristics, would come to, and I find myself still wobbling, because she’s Lydia, and he’s what he is, which would be eminently desirable for some women, but——’ ”

A sudden hush around the table prevented the conclusion of this philosophic utterance. The sportsman of whom she was speaking had risen with a brimming glass of champagne in one hand and was accosting the master of the

THE ORCHID

hounds. A general thrill of expectancy succeeded the hush. What was he going to say? Speeches were not altogether unknown at Westfield hunt breakfasts, but they were not apt to be so impromptu, nor the contribution of such a negative soul as Herbert Maxwell. Gerald Marcy, sitting next to Mrs. Cole, was prompted to repeat his observation of the morning. "I was right," he whispered. "He has seen the Holy Grail."

"Wait — just wait," she answered tensely. *She* knew what was going to happen, and as her dark eyes vibrated deftly from Herbert's face to Lydia's and back again, she longed for two pairs that she might not for an instant lose the expression on either. Meanwhile the host had rapped on the table and was saying encouragingly:

THE ORCHID

"Our friend Mr. Herbert Maxwell desires to make a few remarks."

"Hear—hear!" cried Douglas Hale raucously. His fall had obviously dulled the nicety of his instincts, for everyone else was too curious to utter a word—too rapt to invade the interesting silence.

Maxwell had worn the air of a demi-god when he rose. A wave of self-consciousness doubtless obliterated the introductory phrases which he had learned by heart, for after a moment's painful silence he suddenly blurted out:

"I'm the happiest man in the world, and I want you all to know it."

Here was the kernel of the whole matter. What better could he have said? What more was there left to say? The riddle was solved, and the suspense which had hung over Westfield like a cloud for

THE ORCHID

many months was dissolved in a rainbow of romance. There was no need of names; everybody understood, and a shout of delight followed. Every woman in the room shrieked her congratulations to the bride-to-be, and those nearest her got possession of her person. Miss Peggy Blake was the nearest and hence the first.

“You dear thing! It’s just splendid; the most intensely exciting thing which ever happened!” she cried, throwing her arms around Lydia’s neck. In the embrace her hair, which had become loose during the run, fell about her ears, and Guy Perry had to get down on his knees to find the gilt hair-pins. There was a babel of superlatives, and delirious feminine laughter; the men wrung the happy lover’s hands or patted him on the back.

When the turmoil subsided Maxwell

THE ORCHID

was still standing. Like St. Michael over the prostrate dragon, he had planted his feet securely for once in his life on the necks of the serpents Diffidence and Repression. He put out his hand to invite silence.

"I ask you to drink to the happiness of the loveliest woman in creation. When a man worships a woman as I do her, and she has done him the honor to plight him her troth, why shouldn't he bear witness to his love and blazon her charms and virtues to the stars? God knows I'm going to make her happy, if I can! To the happiness of my future wife, Miss Lydia Arnold!"

"All up!" cried the master, and as the company rose under the spell of love's fervid invocation, he added authoritatively, "No heel taps!"

THE ORCHID

As they drained their glasses and were in the act of sitting down, Guy Perry conveyed the cordial sentiment of all present toward the proposer of the toast and lover-elect by beginning to troll,

For he's a jolly good fellow—

For he's a jolly good fellow.

Under cover of the swelling song Mrs. Walter Cole, fluttering in her seat, and with her eyes fastened on Lydia's countenance, felt the need of taking Gerald Marcy into her confidence.

"I just wonder what she thinks of it. His letting himself go like that is rather nice; but it isn't at all in her style. If she is truly in love with him, it doesn't matter. But there she sits with that inscrutable smile, perfectly serene, but not in the least

THE ORCHID

worked up, apparently. Our embraces didn't even ruffle her hair."

"He has been repressing himself—been on his good behavior for years, poor fellow," murmured Marcy.

"I tell you I like his calling her the loveliest woman in creation and thinking it. Such guileless fervor is much too rare nowadays. But what effect will it have on Lydia, who knows she isn't? That is what is troubling me. Unless she is deeply smitten, won't it bore her?"

The question was but the echo of her spirit's wonder; she did not expect a categorical response. Whatever good thing Gerald Marcy was meditating in reply was nipped in the bud by an appeal to him for "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party" as a continuation of the outburst of song. He felt obliged to comply, and yet was nothing

THE ORCHID

loth, as it was one of the most popular in his repertory, and was adapted to his sweet if somewhat spavined tenor voice.

In the skies the bright stars glittered,
On the bank the pale moon shone,
And 'twas from Aunt Dinah's quilting party
I was seeing Nellie home.

So he sang with melodious precision, accompanying his performance with that slight exaggeration of chivalric manner which distinguished the rendering of his ditties. The words just suited the sensibilities of the company, combining feeling with banter, and in full-voiced unison they caught up the refrain:

I was seeing Nellie ho-o-me—
I was seeing Nellie ho-o-me,
And 'twas from Aunt Dinah's quilting party
I was seeing Nellie home.

THE ORCHID

Laughing feminine eyes shot merry glances in the direction of Lydia, and the red-coated sportsmen lifted their glasses in grandiloquent apostrophe of the affianced pair. Andrew Cunningham, resplendent in a canary-colored waistcoat with fine red bars, was heard to remark confidentially, after ordering another whiskey and soda, that the festivities which were certain to follow in the wake of this engagement would add five pounds to his weight, which it had taken him two months of Spartan abstemiousness to reduce three.

Erect and sportsmanlike, Gerald continued, after an impressive sweep of his hand to promote silence:

On my arm her light hand rested,
Rested light as o-o-cean's foam,
And 'twas from Aunt Dinah's quilting party
I was seeing Nellie home.

THE ORCHID

It was a red-letter day not only for the master of the hounds but for Westfield's entire colony. Conjecture was at an end; the love-god had triumphed; the announcement was a fitting wind-up to the exhilarating hunting season. Yet amid the general congratulation and optimism some philosophic souls like Mrs. Walter Cole did not forbear to wonder what was to be the sequel.

III

PRECISE consideration by Lydia of her feelings for her betrothed—and presently her husband, as they were married in the following January—were rendered superfluous for the time being by the worship which he lavished upon her. There were so many other things to think of: first her engagement ring, which called forth ejaculations of envious admiration from her contemporaries; then her trousseau, the costumes of her bridesmaids, the details of the ceremony and the wedding breakfast, and the important question whether the honeymoon was to be spent in Europe. There was never any doubt as to this in Lydia's mind. After deliberation she had

THE ORCHID

decided on a winter passage by the Mediterranean route to Nice and Cannes, followed by a summer in the Tyrol and Switzerland, with a fortnight in Paris to repair the ravages in her wardrobe made by changing fashion. It must not be understood that Maxwell demurred to this attractive programme. He merely intimated that if he remained at home and demonstrated what he called his serious side, he would probably receive a nomination for the Legislature in the autumn; that the party managers had predicted as much; and that the favorable introduction into politics thus obtained might lead to Congress or a foreign mission, as he had the means to live up to either position worthily.

Lydia listened alertly. "I should like you to go as ambassador to Paris or Lon-

THE ORCHID

don some day, of course, but to serve in the Legislature now would scarcely conduce to that, Herbert. I've set my heart on going abroad—I've never been but once, you know—and it's just the time to go when we are building our two houses. Where should we live if we stayed at home? The sensible plan is to store our presents, buy some tapestries and old furniture on the other side, and come back in time to get the autumn hunting at Westfield and inaugurate our two establishments."

This settled the matter. The only real uncertainty had been whether she did not prefer a trip around the world instead. But that would take too long. She was eager to figure as the mistress of the most stately modern mansion and the most consummate country house which money and

THE ORCHID

architectural genius could erect. These two houses were perhaps the most engrossing of all among the many concerns which led her to postpone precise analysis of her feelings to a period of greater leisure. That is the exact quality of her love—whether it were eighteen carat or not, to adopt a simile suggested to her by her wedding-ring. That she loved Herbert sufficiently well to marry him was the essential point; and it seemed futile to play hide-and-seek with her own consciousness over the abstract proposition whether she could have loved someone else better, especially as there were so many immediately pressing matters to consider that both her physician and Herbert had warned her she was liable, if not prudent, to fall a victim to that lurking ailment, nervous prostration.

THE ORCHID

It was certainly no slight responsibility to select the lot in town which seemed to combine most advantages as the site for a residence. The matter of the country house was much simpler, for who could doubt that the ideal location was an expanse of undulating country, higher than the rest of the neighborhood, known as Norrey's Farm? These fifty acres, with woods appurtenant, were reputed to be out of the market unless to a single purchaser. Many a pioneer had picked out Norrey's Knoll as his choice, only to be thwarted by the owner with the assertion that he must buy the whole farm or could have none. Later would-be purchasers had recoiled before the price, which had kept not merely abreast but had galloped ahead of current valuations, until it had become a by-word in the colony that Farmer Norrey would

THE ORCHID

bite his own nose off if he were not careful. But the shrewd rustic was more than vindicated by the upshot. Lydia, from the moment when she first seriously thought of Herbert Maxwell as a husband, had cast sheeps' eyes at this stately property, and within a short period after the engagement was announced the title deeds passed. Rumor declared that the canny grantor had divined that the opportunity of his life was at hand and had held out successfully for still higher figures. But, as everybody cheerfully remarked, ten thousand dollars more or less was but a flea-bite to Herbert Maxwell.

Then came the selection of the architects and divers inspections of plans for the two establishments, which, to the joy of the bridegroom, were interrupted by the wedding ceremony. They sailed, and their

THE ORCHID

honeymoon was somewhat of a social parade. Special quarters—the most expensive and exclusive to be had—were engaged for them in advance on steamships and in railroad trains, in hotels and wherever they appeared. Maxwell's manifest tender purpose was to gratify his bride's slightest whim, and in regard to the choice of the objects on which his ready money was to be lavished he avoided taking the initiative except when an occasional mania seized him to buy her costly gems on the sly. Otherwise he danced attendance on her taste, which was discriminating and perspicuous. Lydia yearned for distinction, not extravagance; for superlative effects, not garishness. Her eye was on the lookout in regard to all the affairs of life, from food to the manifestations of art, for the note which accurately expressed elegant

THE ORCHID

and fastidious comfort and gave the rebuff to every-day results or the antics of vulgarity.

Consequently the wedding trip after the first surprises was but a change of scene. There were still too many absorptions for retrospective thought and nice balancing of soul accounts. At Nice and Cannes they found themselves in a vortex of small gayeties. While travelling, Lydia was on the alert to pick up old tapestries, porcelain, and other works of art; in Paris, shopping and the dressmakers left no time for anything but a daily lesson to put the finishing touch to her French. She had said to herself that she would draw a trial balance of her precise emotions when she was at rest on the steamer—for Lydia by instinct was a methodical person; but a batch of letters reciting complications in

THE ORCHID

regard to the last details on the new houses was a fresh distraction, and the society of several engaging men on the ship another. Nevertheless the thought that she was nearing home struck her fancy favorably, and on the evening before they landed she eluded everybody else to seize her husband's arm for a promenade on deck. There was elasticity in her step as she said, "Won't it be fun to be at Westfield again, Herbert? I long for a good run with the hounds, and I'm beginning to pine for the autumn colors and smells."

"Yes, indeed. And we shall be settled at our own fireside at last," he answered with a lover's animation.

The remark recalled bothersome considerations to Lydia's mind. She felt sure from the contents of the last packet of correspondence that the architect had failed

THE ORCHID

to carry out her instructions in several instances.

“Settled?” she echoed. “If we are settled a year from now we may consider ourselves very fortunate.”

Lydia’s immediate plans met with interruption from an unexpected source. Before the hunting season had fairly begun it was privately whispered in Westfield circles that a stork would presently visit the new establishment on Norrey’s Farm. Open inquiries from tactless interrogators, why the Maxwells did not follow the hounds, were answered by the explanation that the young people had so many matters to attend to in connection with their two houses that they had decided to postpone hunting to another year. Later it was known that they would pass the winter in the country, and not furnish the town house

THE ORCHID

until spring. When the baby was actually born, in February, everyone knew that it was expected; but the advent of the infant in the flesh caused a flutter among Lydia's immediate feminine acquaintances. As soon as the mother was able to receive visitors, Mrs. Walter Cole came down from town to offer her warm felicitations and incidentally to satisfy the curiosity of those who took an interest. She had arranged to lunch after the interview with the Andrew Cunninghams, who lived all the year round at Westfield, and thither at the close of the visit to her intimate friend she repaired, replete with information. It happened to be Saturday, and the master of the house had brought down Ger ld Marcy by an early train for a winter's afternoon tramp across country, so that the two women had only a few minutes of unre-served conversation.

THE ORCHID

“Well, she was just as one would have expected—Lydia all over,” Mrs. Cole began with the intensity of a pent-up stream which has regained its freedom. “She looked sweet, and everything in her room and in the nursery was bewitching, as though she had been preparing for the event for years and doted on it. That’s just like her, of course. She bemoaned her fate at losing the hunting season, and she has decided not to nurse the baby. As an experienced mother,” continued Mrs. Cole contemplatively, “I felt bound to remind her that there are two sides to that question, and that I had nursed Toto and Jim not only because Walter insisted on it, but to give the children the benefit of the doubt as to any possible effect on character from being suckled by a stranger. But she had thought it all out, and had her arguments

THE ORCHID

at her fingers' ends. She declared it a case of Anglo-Saxon prejudice, and that every Frenchwoman of position sends her babies to a foster-mother. Of course it is a bother, and frightfully confining, but my husband wouldn't hear of it, though half the mamas can't satisfy their babies anyway."

Mrs. Cunningham nodded understandingly. "I daresay it's just as well. And of course she regards the rest of us as old-fashioned. But tell me about the baby."

Mrs. Cole laughed. "You ought to have heard Lydia on the subject. She talks of it in the most impersonal way, as though it belonged to someone else or were a wedding present. I never cared much for babies before I was married, but could not endure anyone who wouldn't make flattering speeches about mine. Lydia's is a dear little thing as they go,

THE ORCHID

and has a fascinating wardrobe already, and I think she is rather devoted to it in her secret soul, but one of the first things she said to me—before I could get in a single compliment—was, ‘She’s the living image of Grandma Maxwell, Fannie. She has her mouth and nose.’ And the embarrassing part was that it’s true. The moment Lydia called my attention to it I saw. Her eagle maternal eye had detected what the ordinary mother would have failed to perceive. But it’s Grandma Maxwell to the life. ‘Why evade the truth?’ remarked Lydia after one of her deliberate pauses. ‘I shall name her for her, and I can discern in advance that she will never be a social success.’ ”

“Poor little thing!” murmured Mrs. Cunningham. Such an anathema so early in life was certainly heart-rending.

THE ORCHID

Mrs. Cole put her head on one side like an arch bird by way of reflective protest. "It sounds dreadful, of course, but remember she's Lydia. What she will really do will be to metamorphose her, body and soul, so that by the time she is eighteen there will not be one trace of Maxwell visible to the naked eye. See if I'm not right," she said with the gusto of a brilliant inspiration which seemed to her a logical defence of her friend.

The arrival of the men interrupted the dialogue, but the general topic was presently resumed from another point of view. Not many minutes had elapsed after they sat down to luncheon before Gerald Marcy hazarded the observation that, prophecies and innuendoes to the contrary notwithstanding, events in the Maxwell household appeared to have followed the course of

THE ORCHID

nature. Mrs. Cole, to whom this remark was directly addressed, ignored the sly impeachment of her abilities as a seer, and, having finished her piece of buttered toast, said blandly:

“I think Lydia is very happy.”

“I felt sure she would be tamed,” continued Marcy with a tug at his mustache. “I look to see her become a model of the domestic virtues.”

“Don’t be too sure that she is tamed, Gerald,” said Mrs. Cunningham. “Lydia is Lydia.” Perhaps the knowledge that she had been longing in vain for years for a child of her own gave the cue to this slightly brusque comment.

“Lydia will never be exactly like the rest of us; that’s her peculiarity—virtue—what shall I call it?” interposed Mrs. Cole, looking round the table with a philosophic air.

THE ORCHID

"The rest of us demur at conventions, but accept them in the end. She follows what she deems the truth. I don't say that she is always right or that she doesn't do queer things," she added by way of conservative qualification of her bubbling encomium.

"And how about Maxwell?" asked Andrew Cunningham, who had seemed temporarily lost in the contemplation of his lobster salad so long as any of that lusciously prepared viand remained on his plate. "Infatuated as ever, I suppose," he added, sitting back in his chair and exposing benignly his broad expanse of neckcloth and fancy check waistcoat.

"Yes, and he ought to be, surely. But Lydia has a rival in the daughter of the house," answered Mrs. Cole, reinspired by the inquiry. "He came in just as I was leaving, and is almost daft on the subject

THE ORCHID

of the baby. If Lydia's ecstasy is somewhat below the normal, he more than makes up for the deficiency. There never was such a proud parent. He just 'chortled in his joy.' He discerns in her already all the graces and virtues, and would like to do something at once—he doesn't know exactly what—to bring them to the attention of an unappreciative world. If it were a boy, he could put his name down on the waiting lists at the clubs, but as she is only a girl, he must content himself with hanging over her crib for the present."

"Only a girl!" echoed Marcy. "Born with a golden spoon in her mouth, an heiress to all the virtues and graces, and predestined doubtless, like her mother, to rest her dainty foot upon the neck of man. Nevertheless, as I have already prophesied, I am inclined to think that the yoke

THE ORCHID

—now a double yoke—will not bear too severely on Maxwell, though it may not yield him the bliss which we unregenerate bachelors are wont to associate with the ideal marital relation.”

“Hear—hear!” exclaimed Andrew Cunningham. “You need some further liquid refreshment after that silver-tongued sophistry, Gerald.—Mary,” he said to the maid, “pass the whiskey and soda to Mr. Marcy.”

Mrs. Cole put her head on one side. “I have my doubts whether the ideal marital relation is a modern social possibility—the strictly ideal such as you bachelors mean,” she added, feeling, doubtless, as the wife of a man to whom she had described herself in heart-to-heart talks with other women—not many, for she eschewed the subject ordinarily as sacred—as deeply attached,

THE ORCHID

that this homily on wedlock needed a qualifying tag.

But May Cunningham was not in the mood to become a party to even so tempered an imputation on connubial happiness. "Speak for yourself, Fannie," she said sturdily. "Ideals or no ideals, Andrew and I trot in double harness better than any single animal of my acquaintance."

"Listen to the old woman, God bless her!" exclaimed the master of the house, raising his tumbler and smiling at his better-half with chivalrous expansiveness.

Mrs. Cole was a little nettled at Mrs. Cunningham's obtuseness—wilful obtuseness, it seemed to her. As though the subtle social problem suggested by her was to be solved by a reference to the homely affection of this amiable but limited couple! She sighed and murmured,

THE ORCHID

"Everyone knows, my dear, that you and Andrew are as happy as the day is long. But I'm afraid that you don't understand exactly what I meant."

Mrs. Cunningham compressed her lips ominously. She felt that she understood perfectly well, and that it was simply another case of Fannie Cole's nonsense. But any retort she may have been meditating was averted by the timely and genial inspiration of her husband.

"One thing is certain," he said: "we all know that our Gerald is the ideal bachelor."

This assertion called forth cordial acquiescence from both the ladies, and turned the current of the conversation into a smoother channel. The subject of the remark bowed decorously.

"In this company I am free to admit

THE ORCHID

that I sometimes sigh in secret for a happy home. Yet even venerable bachelorhood has its compensations. By the way," he added, "our colony at Westfield is likely to have an addition to its stud of bachelors. I hear that Harry Spencer is coming home."

"Harry Spencer? How interesting," cried the two women in the same breath.

"The fascinator," continued Mrs. Cole with slow, sardonic articulation.

"To break some other woman's heart, I suppose," said Mrs. Cunningham.

"And yet it is safe to say that he will be received with open arms by your entire sex, including the present company," remarked Gerald with a tug at his mustache.

The sally was received with pensive silence as a deduction apparently not to be gainsaid.

THE ORCHID

"He is very agreeable," said Mrs. Cunningham flatly.

"And extremely handsome," said Mrs. Cole. "Not the type of manly beauty which would cause my mature heart to flutter, but dangerous to the youthful imagination. He used to look like a handsome pirate, and if he had whispered honeyed words to me instead of to Laura—who knows?"

"Poor Laura!"

"They had neither of them a cent; there was nothing for him to do but withdraw. And yet there is no doubt he broke her heart, though there is consumption in her family." Mrs. Cole knit her brows over this attempt on her part to formulate complete justice.

"He's a woman's man," said Andrew Cunningham. He had stepped to the mantel-piece to fill his pipe, and having uttered

THE ORCHID

this fell speech, he lit it and smoked for some moments in silence with his back to the cheerful wood fire before proceeding. No one had seen fit to contradict him. The gaps between his assertions and the subsequent explanations thereof were expected and rarely interrupted. "He does everything well—rides, shoots, plays rackets, golf, cards—is infernally good-looking, as you say, has a pat speech and a flattering eye for every woman he looks at, and yet somehow he has always struck me as a *poseur*. I wouldn't trust him in a tight place, though he prides himself on his sporting blood. It may be prejudice on my part. Gerald likes him, I believe, because he is a keen rider and always has a good mount. He always has the best of everything going, but what does he live on anyway?"

THE ORCHID

"Wild oats, perhaps," suggested Marcy. But he hastened to atone for this levity by adding, "He had a little money from his mother, while it lasted, and just after he and Miss Wilford drifted apart, I am told that he followed a tip from Guy Perry on copper stocks and cleaned up enough to enable him to travel round the world."

"Poor Laura!" interjected Mrs. Cole. "What a pity he didn't get a tip earlier!"

"It wasn't enough to marry on," said Marcy, "and it's probably mostly gone by this time."

"That's the sort of thing I complain of," exclaimed Cunningham. "I'm no martinet in morals, Heaven knows, but I always feel a little on my guard with fellows who live by their wits and spend like princes. Confound it, you know it isn't quite respectable even in a free country."

THE ORCHID

Andrew spoke with a wag of his head as though he expected to be adjudged an old fogey for this conservative utterance.

"He's an attractive fellow on the surface anyway," answered Marcy after a pause, "and will be an addition from the hunting standpoint. And—give the devil his due, Andrew—if he was looking for money only, there were several heiresses he might have married. That would have made him irreproachable at once."

Mrs. Cole drew a long breath. "Perfectly true, Mr. Marcy. I never thought of it before. Harry Spencer doesn't look at a woman twice unless he admires her, no matter how rich she is. He could have married several, of course, if he had tried."

"Dozens. That's the humiliating part of it," assented Mrs. Cunningham.

"When he is ready to settle down that's

THE ORCHID

what he'll do—pick out some woman with barrels of money," said Andrew. Having once got a proposition in his head he was wont to stick to it tenaciously, like a puppy to a root.

"You misjudge him—you misjudge him!" cried Mrs. Cole eagerly. "He won't do anything of the kind. He will never marry any woman unless she has money—or he has; that I'm ready to admit. But, on the other hand, he'll never ask anyone to marry him unless he loves her for herself alone, and—and," she continued with a gasp born of the thrill which the definiteness of her insight caused her, "there are very few women in the world whom he is liable to fall in love with. That's what makes him so interesting. He is polite to us all, but the majority of women bore him at heart."

THE ORCHID

Marcy laughed. "A masterly diagnosis," he said. "And now that he has seen the world and is returning heart-free, so far as we know, there will naturally be curiosity as to how he will bear the ordeal of a fresh contact with native loveliness."

"Exactly," said the two women together, and with an engaging frankness which quite overshadowed the grunt by which the master of the house indicated his suspicious dissent from this exposition of character.

IV

HARRY SPENCER had been travelling nearly three years. Naturally, he found some changes and some new faces at Westfield. Concerning the former he was becomingly appreciative. He promptly ranged himself on the side of progress, admired the new club-house and the new establishments in the neighborhood, and evinced a willingness to take an active part in the enlarged energies of the club. During his peregrinations in foreign lands he had visited the St. Andrew's golf links, and he had views regarding bunkers and other features of the game which he was prepared to advocate. When he had left home the bicycle was all the rage, and

THE ORCHID

some portion of his journeyings had been on an up-to-date machine. But he found now that the fashionable portion of the community had dropped this craze, and that to ride a "wheel" was beginning to be considered a bore except as a means of getting from one place to another. The fever of golf was rampant instead, and had reached the stage where its votaries were almost delirious in their devotion, notably the people most unfitted to play the game, and who had taken it up in order to be in fashion. During the spring and summer following his return the improved links at Westfield was crowded with players of every grade whose proficiency was generally in reverse proportion to the number of clubs they carried.

Soon after the season had fairly opened and the greens were in good order the

THE ORCHID

lately returned wanderer found himself one morning engaged in giving a lesson in the royal and ancient game to Miss Peggy Blake, who had a severe attack of the disease and promised to be a proficient pupil, for Dobson, the professional at the Hunt Club, had declared that she had a free swing and could follow through as well as most men. The trouble at the moment was that, after taking a free swing, she either failed to hit the ball altogether or hit it off at some distressing angle. As she explained volubly to everybody, until within a week she had been making screaming brassie shots which carried a hundred and fifty yards, but had suddenly lost her game completely. Harry had kindly offered himself as a coach, a delightful proposition to the blithe young woman, especially as Dobson was engaged

THE ORCHID

for the time being in superintending the primary and elephantine efforts of Miss Ella Marbury, the stout maiden sister of Wagner Marbury, the Western multi-millionnaire and proprietor of one of the new neighboring palaces so obnoxious to Mrs. Cunningham. Miss Peggy was more than pleased to have for an hour or two the uninterrupted companionship of this good-looking and redoubtable gallant, whose attentions were to be regarded as a feather in her cap, and who would doubtless be able to tell her what she was doing wrong.

Hers was one of the new faces, and Harry had given his following to understand that he admired her spirited and comely personality. "Miss West Wind" he had christened her genially, and the epithet had spread with the rumor that he had noticed her. Yet it was tacitly under-

THE ORCHID

stood that he had no intention of interfering with the suit of his friend Guy Perry, who was supposed to be well in the lead of the other pursuers of the breezy maiden. Yet, though he sought to give the impression that his favor in this case was merely an artistic tribute and that he still walked scatheless in the world of women, he was glad of an opportunity to stroll over the links in her society. She would entertain him. Besides, she was a fluent talker, and he could count on her retailing for his edification more or less of the current history of Westfield written between the lines, which was only to be picked up gradually by one who had been prevented by absence from personal observation.

It was a very simple matter to detect the trouble with his companion's stroke.

"You don't keep your eye on the ball,

THE ORCHID

Miss Blake. That's the whole trouble with you. Anyone can see that."

Peggy looked incredulous. "If there is one special thing more than another which I try to bear constantly in mind, it is to keep my eye on the ball. Do I really take it off, Mr. Spencer? Of course you must know. There are so many other things to remember, but I did think I was completely disciplined on that point. Watch me now."

Thereupon she proceeded to execute a dashing stroke, her evident standard being to carry her club through with such velocity as to bring the head round her left shoulder and cause her to execute a pirouette like the pictures of the golfing girls in the magazines. The ball flew off at a tangent and narrowly missed her own caddy.

THE ORCHID

"How rotten!" she murmured. "I had both my eyes glued on the ball, and you see what happened. And only a week ago I was driving like a streak." Her expletive was merely the popular phrase of the day by which golden youth of both sexes was apt to express even trivial dissatisfaction.

She was a pathetic figure of distress. Her exertions had heightened her color so that it suggested the poppy rather than the rose, and was not unlike the hue of her trig golfing garment. She swept back a stray ringlet which had escaped from under her hat. "You see I have lost my game utterly, Mr. Spencer."

Harry laughed. "You were looking at me out of the corners of your eyes that time. Lower your lids until you exaggerate the modest maiden and don't move

THE ORCHID

your head." It was a half-deferential, half-sardonic voice with a caressing touch, indicating temporary devotion to the subject-matter in hand which was flattering. "Swing more easily," he added, "and don't try to rival the Gibson girl until you recover confidence." Then he corrected slightly her stance and the position of her hands—all with a deft yet bantering grace of manner which soothed and attracted her. He went through the correct motions of the stroke for her enlightenment, and as he stood erect and supple Peggy did not forbear to reflect that he was very handsome. How dark his hair and eyes were! It was a bold sort of beauty, and, though he wore neither moustache nor beard, the faintly bluish tinge of his complexion betrayed that, but for the barber, he would have been what Mrs.

THE ORCHID

Herbert Cole might have termed an incarnate symphony in black. He appeared harmoniously muscular. He executed the necessary movements with lithe, nervous energy, focusing his attention tensely for the brief occasion. The moment he lowered his club he regained his leisurely and rather indolent demeanor.

His pupil essayed to follow his instructions. At the third attempt the ball sailed straight as an arrow to a moderate distance, which comforted the performer, but she felt too nervously excited to exult. It might be only an accident.

"Try again," he said confidentially. "You've almost got it."

Once more the ball shot correctly from the club. Harry stooped and placed another on the tee. Peggy swung, then followed through with a little of her old

THE ORCHID

elasticity. It flew like a rifle bullet low and long across the distant bunker.

She rose on the tips of her toes as she followed its entrancing flight. "I've got back my game," she cried jubilantly. "You've saved my life, Mr. Spencer." She looked as though she would have been glad, had convention permitted, to throw her arms around her benefactor's neck. And to the true golfer it would not seem an exaggerated reward. "I've been in the slough of despond for nearly a week, and playing worse every day. Now I'm in the seventh heaven, and it's all your doing."

He acknowledged the exuberant gratitude with a graceful mock heroic bow. "I shall consider my terms. The charge should be considerable."

Just then by the sheerest chance a white carnation which Peggy was wearing at her

THE ORCHID

throat became detached from her dress and fell to the ground. He picked it up, and, holding it before him and looking into her eyes, said with melodious assurance:

"I will keep this, if I may, as my tuition fee."

Peggy looked embarrassed and let fall her eyes, albeit not easily disconcerted. The carnation was one from a bunch which Guy Perry had sent her the day before, and to hand it over seemed almost an act of treason, though they were not yet actually engaged. Yet she was conscious that she thought this new acquaintance charming. Silence gives consent where lovely woman is concerned. At any rate, when she looked up he was in the act of placing it in his buttonhole. But his fingers had paused in their work as a consequence of his arrested glance. A feminine figure out-

THE ORCHID

lined on the crest of adjacent rising ground had suddenly caught his eye. She was addressing her ball for a brassie shot, and as he gazed it was performed with a sweeping grace of which the lack of effort was the salient charm.

Peggy, whose eyes had promptly followed the direction of his, vouchsafed the desired information.

"Mrs. Herbert Maxwell."

"Really!" There was a shade of interest in the monosyllable, as though the identity of some one whom he had been rather curious to meet had been revealed to him.

"You haven't met her?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, you'd like her immensely."

The words were uttered with such naive confidence that Harry Spencer turned away

THE ORCHID

his gaze from the new attraction to survey the old.

"How do you know?" he inquired jauntily.

Peggy spluttered a little at this flank attack. "Oh, well, you know, she's so awfully clever. She's different. She'd pique your curiosity anyway," she concluded, recovering her aplomb.

"Am I so difficult to please?" he asked sententiously. He answered the question himself. "Yes, I admit that I am." His look of admiration, which Peggy divined was constitutional with him on such occasions, was best to be met by diversion.

"I shall never be able to play golf as Lydia Maxwell does, and I've been at it twice as long. She has only played this spring, and Dobson says that she has a better idea of the game than any other

THE ORCHID

woman. It's just knack with her, for her balls go farther than mine and yet she makes scarcely an exertion. You couldn't help admire her in all sorts of ways. It has been a dreadfully quiet season for her, though, for when her baby was six weeks old and she had sent out cards for two musical parties in their new town house, her husband's mother, old Mrs. Maxwell, died suddenly, and she had to go into mourning. So they went to Southern California for February and March, and moved down here as soon as they returned. She took lessons in golf at Los Angeles, and she beat me four up the first time we played, even though I supposed I could give her half a stroke."

While he listened to this monologue, Spencer followed the progress of the subject of it. She was playing with pretty

THE ORCHID

Mrs. Baxter, but, though her opponent was an ordinarily graceful woman, there was a deft harmony in her movements which made Mrs. Baxter appear an unfinished person by comparison.

"They say the real secret is that she has an artistic temperament." The speech was Peggy's by way of reading his thoughts and providing a condensed and comprehensive key.

"And her husband—what is he like? You know he has come to the surface during my absence."

"He hasn't it at all—I mean an artistic temperament. But he's an awfully good sort—awfully; a true sport, and kind as can be." Peggy's vocabulary of enthusiasm, though fundamentally native, sometimes made reprisals on the kindred jargon of Great Britain.

THE ORCHID

"I see. And you infer that I have an artistic temperament?" A tendency toward challenging unexpectedness was one of Spencer's prime manifestations with women.

Peggy looked embarrassed. She had not bargained for such an unequivocal piece of teasing. She put up her hand to her head to secure her escaping comb. "I don't know you very well, of course, but I had supposed so. Yet I'm not clever, and I dote on Lydia," she added archly.

Harry Spencer did not have to go out of his way for an opportunity to satisfy his curiosity by personal acquaintance with Mrs. Herbert Maxwell. When he and his fair partner had finished the last hole and approached the piazza of the new clubhouse, they found her sitting there—one of a group of both sexes waiting for luncheon.

THE ORCHID

Peggy, radiant and prodigal of superlatives, proclaimed to one after another that her game had come back. Wasn't it perfectly glorious?—the loveliest thing which had ever happened. And Mr. Spencer had detected at once what was wrong. "Just think of it, I was pressing and took my eye off the ball," she kept reiterating, "and I never knew it. Wasn't it dear of him?"

One of the most characteristic features of golf is that it is not an altruistic pastime. Everyone is feverishly absorbed by the state of his own game, and does not care at heart a picayune for his neighbor's. At the moment of Peggy's vociferous advent the assembled company were talking in pairs, and each member of each pair was endeavoring to excite the interest of his or her partner in the dialogue by glowing or dejected narration of why his or her score

THE ORCHID

was lower or higher than the speaker's average. In some cases both were talking at once and neither listened. Oftener, perhaps, each had asserted an innings, and the strongest or most persistent lungs held the mastery. Miss Marbury, who under the tutelage of Dobson had done the longest hole in 12 and the eighteen holes in 132—five better than ever before—was bubbling over with ecstasy and soliciting congratulations. Douglas Hale, who had failed by one stroke to surpass his previous record of 82, was telling hoarsely and pathetically to everyone whom he could buttonhole how it happened.

“At the fourteenth hole I was on the green in two and took seven for the hole. Seven! Just think of that, seven! Five strokes on the green.” As he uttered the words with excruciating precision, he

THE ORCHID

would hold up the five fingers of his hand and shake them at his auditor. It was an experience which would last him all day and as far into the evening as he could find new listeners, especially if he could endeavor to take the edge off his disappointment by Scotch and soda.

Consequently, though everybody heard that Miss Peggy Blake had recovered her game, and her breezy invasion caused a stir, the fact that she had done so was of interest only because of the means by which this had been brought to pass. It was Harry Spencer, not she, who became the cynosure of numerous feminine eyes. If he had put Peggy onto her game, why not them onto theirs? Peggy, mistaking the reason for the pause in the general chatter for interest in her improvement, proceeded to rehearse gleefully the details

THE ORCHID

of her triumph for the benefit of the company. But Douglas Hale, in no mood to be side-tracked by any such interruption, stepped forward, and hooking his arm in Harry Spencer's, led him apart with a mysterious "A word with you, old man."

Having thus enforced an audience, he held forth in the low tone appropriate to an interesting confidence. "Just now I was 58 at the end of the thirteenth hole, and was on the green of the fourteenth in two, and I took seven for the hole. Five puts on the green! Think of that, five!" he whispered hoarsely, and shook his five fingers in Harry's face. "Seven for the hole. And I finished in 82. Tied my own record. Wasn't that the meanest streak of luck a man ever had? Five puts, and two of them rimmed the cup."

THE ORCHID

His victim listened indulgently. The firm grip on his arm precluded escape.

"You must learn to put, my dear fellow."

"That's the most sickening part of it. I made every other put. Let me tell you—you remember the slope of the fourteenth green? Well, I——"

Realizing what he was in for, Harry took advantage of a momentary pause on the part of his torturer for the purpose of lighting a cigarette. His observing eyes had noticed that Mrs. Maxwell was standing apart from the other women who were within range of Miss Blake's jubilant reiteration. He wrenched himself free from Douglas's clutch.

"It was a case of downright hard luck, and now, in return for my heart-felt sympathy and for listening to your tale of

THE ORCHID

woe, introduce me to Mrs. Herbert Maxwell."

Puffing at his half-lighted cigarette, Douglas Hale reached out to recover his lost grip. "Wait a minute. You haven't heard half. I will show you just how it happened."

Spencer intercepted the reaching fingers and grabbed the offender's wrist, and said, with jocund firmness, "I don't care a tinker's dam how it happened, Douglas, and I tell you you can't put. Introduce me to Mrs. Maxwell."

This quip caused the egotist to draw himself up stiffly. He was proof against hints and ordinary recalcitration, but such an unmistakable rebuff was not to be ignored; that is, he could not with proper self-respect continue the harangue on which he was bent.

THE ORCHID

"Of course if you don't care to hear how it happened, I won't tell you." So saying, Douglas suffered himself to be conveyed the necessary few steps, and performed the ceremony of introduction.

Lydia let her eyes rest with keen but interested scrutiny on this new-comer. He was a boon at the moment, for she had taken the gauge of everybody at Westfield, and was conscious that neither her heart nor her brain was satisfied. She craved novelty and true æsthetic appreciation. Did anyone really understand her? Not even Fannie Cole, who came the nearest to divining her hatred of the commonplace and her dread of being bored. But Fannie, though discerning, chose to remain a slave to the canons of conformity. That morning, in her looking-glass she had asked herself the question, "Why did I ever marry

THE ORCHID

Herbert Maxwell?" But she had asked it with no malice aforethought, merely as one who, with leisure to take account of stock, foots up his assets and puts the question, "Am I solvent?" The interrogation was simply searching and contemplative. The answer had been prompt, and in a measure assuring. "Because it gave me everything I need." Yet, somehow, there remained a cloud upon her spirit. Was this all? Did life offer nothing further?

"We make a fuss and circumstance about our sports," she said.

"They do creak."

It was agreeable to be comprehended so promptly. "It isn't sport for sport's sake, but for the sake of the cups and because it's the thing."

"And above all to beat the other fellow. That's the national creed. It's so in

THE ORCHID

everything—competition. We are brought up from childhood to consider that winning is the thing which counts. We must win at any cost at foot-ball or trade, in affairs or in love.”

She made one of her little pauses. Decidedly he was a kindred spirit and to be cultivated. “I am an exotic then.”

“How so?”

“Competition—the national creed—does not interest me.”

“Because you win so easily. I watched you play this morning. You will have no rival of your own sex here.”

She ignored the tribute; she knew that already; it was the thesis which interested her.

“It bores me—winning, I mean. Golf, for the time being, is a delight.”

He gave her a pirate glance, as though

THE ORCHID

to search her soul, and uttered one of his bold sallies:

“That is, your doll is stuffed with——”

She checked him, shaking her head. “Oh, no. That is, I think not. I have never cut her open. I had in mind something quite different.” Her dainty face grew pensive as she sought the exact phrase to interpret her psychology. “I have never had to struggle for anything. It has always come to me.”

“Exactly.” His note of emphasis reminded her that her words were, after all, merely an indirect echo of his diagnosis. “But your time is sure to come,” he asserted confidently.

The smile of incredulity which curved her lips betrayed entertainment also. “In what field?” she inquired.

Spencer shrugged his shoulders. “I

THE ORCHID

am a student of character, not a sooth-sayer."

"And then?" she queried.

"You will be like the rest of us—only more so. You could not bear to lose at any cost."

What might have seemed effrontery in some men was but a piquant challenge in his mouth, so speciously was it uttered. Lydia was not unaccustomed to men whose current coin was sardonic sallies, as witness the veteran Gerald Marcy. But this was something different. Her soul had been suddenly pitchforked by a professor of anatomy and held up under her nose with the caveat that she was ignorant of the mainsprings of her own behavior. It was impudence, but novel, and she forgave it with the reflection that he would live to eat his gratuitous deductions, which would be the neatest form of vengeance.



The smile of incredulity which curved her lips betrayed entertainment also.

V

BEFORE many weeks had elapsed it began to be whispered at Westfield that Harry Spencer and Mrs. Herbert Maxwell were seeing more or less of each other. They appeared together not infrequently on the golf links; it was known that he was giving her lessons at her own house in bridge whist, the new game of cards; they had been met walking in the lanes; and—most significant item, which caused the colony to prick up its ears and ask, “What does this mean?”—two youthful anglers had encountered them strolling in the lonely woods skirting distant Duck Pond. This last discovery, which was early in September, led to the conclusion that, under cover of her mourning, Lydia must have been

THE ORCHID

seeing more of him than anyone had imagined. Yet, even then, though alert brains indulged in knowing innuendoes, Mrs. Cole's epigrammatic estimate of the matter was generally accepted as sound:

"A woman in mourning for her mother-in-law requires diversion."

It seemed probable that Lydia was amusing herself, and that Harry Spencer was playing the tame cat for their mutual edification. The possibility that he had been caught at last and that she was luring him on that she might lead him like a bear with a ring through his nose, and thus avenge her sex for his past indifference, was regarded as unlikely but delightful. That Lydia was enamored of her admirer, and that they both cared, was not seriously entertained until many circumstances seemed to point to such a deduction.

THE ORCHID

Westfield was not wholly without experience in intimacies between husbands or wives and a third party. But, only rarely had there been fire as well as smoke in these cases. And even then there had never been up to this time an open scandal. Matters had been patched up or the veil of diplomatic convention had been drawn so skillfully over them that most people were left in the dark as to the real truth. Almost invariably the intimacies in question reminded one of the antics of horses with too high action who had all the show but little of the quality of runaways; and the preferences manifested were not always inconsistent with conjugal devotion. Consequently, everyone took for granted that this was only another "fake" instance of family disarrangement, entered on to pass the time and to provide that appear-

THE ORCHID

ance of evil which the American woman seems to find a satisfying substitute for the real article. As Mrs. Cole once remarked in defending the propensity to Gerald Marcy, if one's vanity is flattered, why should one go farther?

The buzz of curiosity was stimulated during the ensuing autumn by a variety of fresh and compromising rumors. Consequently, when at a golfing luncheon party given at the club by Mrs. Gordon Wallace in October, Mrs. Baxter, whose blue eyes always suggested innocence, asked in her demure way what the latest news was from "The Knoll," every tongue had something new to impart. The most sensational as well as the latest piece of information was provided by Mrs. Cunningham, who repeated it with the air of one whose faith had at last received a serious shock.

THE ORCHID

"She sat with him on the piazza at 'The Knoll' until three o'clock night before last. Her husband came home at eleven and requested her to go to bed, but there they stayed without him. I call that pretty bad, even if she is Lydia. I wonder how long Herbert Maxwell will permit this sort of thing to go on. Even the worm will turn."

There was an eloquent silence, which was broken by a repetition of Mrs. Cole's whitewashing epigram as to Lydia's need of diversion. Its cleverness and value as a generalization caused a ripple of amusement, but it fell flat as a specific. Old Mrs. Maxwell had been dead many months, yet matters were more disconcerting than ever. Stout Miss Marbury's question was regarded as much more to the point:

"Who saw them, Mrs. Cunningham?"

THE ORCHID

May Cunningham would have preferred to remain silent on this score, but she perceived that the authenticity of her story was dependent on direct testimony. It was a luncheon of eight. She glanced around the table in an appealing manner as much as to say, "This really is not to be spoken of," and said laconically, "There was another couple present." Then, as though she feared on second thought that the wrong persons might be fixed on, she continued: "Neither of them were married. They are supposed to be engaged, and Lydia acted as their chaperone on the piazza while they took a moonlight ride together."

"Who can they have been?" murmured some one sweetly, and there was a general giggle.

"You wormed it out of me," said Mrs. Cunningham doggedly. "You demanded

THE ORCHID

my credentials. But it doesn't matter about those two, of course, for they're in love."

"How about the others?" ventured Mrs. Baxter.

"Truly, Rachel, you shock me," answered Mrs. Cunningham sternly. "It's no joking matter. It's a very serious situation for this colony, in my opinion. People who don't know us do not think any too well of us already because some of us smoke cigarettes and go in for hunting and an open-air life instead of trying to reform somebody. But this will give the gossips a real handle. Besides, it's disreputable."

"But I really wished to know," murmured Mrs. Baxter. "Does either of them care? And if so, which?"

"My own belief," interjected Mrs. Cole, "as I said just now, is that there's nothing in it—nothing serious. Lydia is simply

THE ORCHID

catering to her æsthetic side, and everyone knows Harry Spencer. It seems to me personally that she has gone too far, but that is a question of taste, and, provided her husband doesn't complain, why need we?" Thereupon she popped into her mouth a luscious-looking coffee cream confection and munched it ruminantly.

"It has become a question of morals," asserted Mrs. Cunningham. "If their relations are what we don't believe them to be, it's a disgrace to Westfield. If they are simply amusing themselves, it's heartless, and I know what I would do if I were Herbert Maxwell."

"So do I," exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds, a spirited young matron with the breath of life in her nostrils, yet, as someone once remarked of her, notoriously devoted to her lord and master.

THE ORCHID

"Just what my husband said," added Mrs. Miller, a bride of a year's standing, which, considering nothing whatever had been said, provoked a smile and brought a blush to the countenance of the speaker, which deepened as Mrs. Baxter with her accustomed innocence asked:

"What would you do?"

"Pick out the most seductive-looking woman I could set my eyes on, Rachel dear, and"—blurted out Mrs. Reynolds pungently. As she paused an instant seeking her phrase, Mrs. Cunningham interjected:

"Sh! We understand. That might bring her to her senses."

"But Herbert Maxwell never would," said Mrs. Cole, reaching for another sweetmeat.

"I'm not so sure about that," retorted

THE ORCHID

Mrs. Cunningham. "He's faithful as a mastiff, but goad him too far and he may prove to be a slumbering lion, in my opinion."

"That wouldn't suit Lydia at all," responded Mrs. Cole. The thesis interested her. "She takes for granted, I presume, his unswerving fidelity. Besides, he would consider it morally wrong. I shall be very much surprised, my dear, if you are not mistaken."

"I'm not a married woman," suggested Miss Marbury, "but I think he ought to put a stop in some way or other to the present condition of things, and that it is his fault if he doesn't."

A murmur of acquiescence showed that this was the general sentiment, at which point the discussion of the topic was brought to a close by the hostess's rising

THE ORCHID

from the table—that is, discussion by the party as a whole. After they had repaired to the general sitting-room—that neutral apartment in the club which was appropriated to the use of both sexes—the subject still claimed the attention of the groups into which the company subdivided itself. Here Mrs. Baxter found an opportunity to repeat her inquiry whether either, neither, or both cared, which really was the most interesting uncertainty of the situation, and one which elicited a variety of opinion. Some, like Mrs. Cole, were still incredulous, or chose to be, that either of them was in earnest. But several of the more knowing women wagged their heads in concert with Mrs. Cunningham, who, seated where her vision could rest on the full-length portrait of her husband swathed in pink as the first Master of the Westfield Hounds—one

THE ORCHID

of the new decorative features—repeated data to the effect that Herbert Maxwell was looking glum and was drinking a little—much more than ever before in his life.

“Poor fellow!” sighed Miss Marbury, and she added, as though in self-congratulatory monologue, that there were some compensations in being single.

“Nothing of the kind; you know nothing about it,” said Mrs. Cunningham tartly. She did not choose to hear the institution of holy matrimony traduced by a mere spinster; moreover, her nerves were on edge because of her solicitude lest the most appalling possibility of all were true—that Lydia really cared. For, granting the hypothesis, what might not Lydia do? What would Lydia do? And as yet, though conjecture ran riot and all West-

THE ORCHID

field was holding its breath, no one could speak with authority as to what the truth was. Nevertheless, Mrs. Cunningham, as an observer, was disposed to take a pessimistic view as to what the future had in store for the colony, the good repute of which was precious to her. On the other hand, many of the younger spirits among the women were inclined to regard the mother of the hunt as a croaker, and as they chatted apart from her on this occasion they cited her late opposition to the recent innovations at the club as typical of her mental attitude.

"Yet to-day, if a vote were taken whether we should go back to the old primitive order of things," added Mrs. Miller, "she would be one of the most strenuous defenders of the extra space and improved service which we now enjoy. She can't

THE ORCHID

keep her eyes off that portrait of her husband. Look at her now."

The stricture, so far as it related to Mrs. Cunningham's change of front regarding the alterations, was just. Yet her frank acceptance and enjoyment of the more decorative rooms and ampler creature-comforts, even though they wore a radiance reflected from her husband's full-length figure, revealed a broad and accommodating mind. There are some persons who will continue to glorify the superseded past even in the face of a manifestly more charming present. These are the real old fogies, and there is no help for us, or them, but to ignore them. But Mrs. Cunningham was of the sort which, though conservative, is ready to be convinced even against its will; and, having been convinced, she was able to draw her husband

THE ORCHID

after her. A week's occupation of the new quarters having made clear to her that, though more luxurious, they were vastly more convenient, she had sighed and given in. Now there were no two more resolute defenders of the results of the radical policy than she and Andrew. Nevertheless she drew the line there, and still, suspicious of what others defined as the march of progress, she was prepared like a faithful sentinel to challenge developments which aroused her distrust. Because the new clubhouse was a success, and the inroad of multi-millionnaires had not been so subversive of the best interests of the colony as she had feared, there was no occasion to relax her vigilance. Thus she argued, and hence her genuine and somewhat foreboding solicitude as to Lydia's behavior.

But though Harry Spencer continued to

THE ORCHID

dog the footsteps of Mrs. Maxwell, so that he appeared in her society on all occasions, and people wondered more and more how the husband could permit this triangular household to continue without open demur, there were no new developments during the late autumn and winter. Rumors of every description were rife, but no one of the three interested parties deigned to provide a solution of the enigma. Maxwell's demeanor on the surface was so far unruffled that certain observers continued to maintain that his wife's state of mind was entirely platonic; in other words, that he trusted Lydia, and, though he might have preferred more of her society, was willing she should amuse herself in her own way—which was not apt to be the conventional way. And if he did not object, why should anyone else, especially as the

THE ORCHID

Maxwells were now in their town house and local censorship by Westfield was suspended? But the majority shook their heads, and repeated that though Maxwell held his peace, he was out of sorts and still drinking more than his wont. Then, just as the community was getting a little weary of the whole subject because nothing did happen, the breaking out of the war with Spain drove it out of everyone's mind.

For the Westfield Hunt Club was up in arms at the first suggestion of powder. All the small talk that spring bore on the matter of enlisting, or on the men who had enlisted. Everyone wished to be a rough rider, and if a commission in that favorite corps had been the certain prerogative of an offer of service, all the able-bodied bachelors in the colony would have enrolled themselves. As it was, there were numerous

THE ORCHID

applicants for this particular aggregation of fighters, but only Kenneth Post, the master of the hounds, succeeded in joining it. Half a dozen obtained billets elsewhere: Guy Perry on one of the war vessels despatched to Cuban waters, young Joe Marbury in another of the volunteer regiments, and Dick Weston, pretty Mrs. Baxter's brother, on one of the yachts converted into a coast guard for the protection of our Atlantic cities against bombardment by the battle-ships of Spain.

Harry Spencer was also one of the half dozen. When he promptly proffered his services to the Government, it was somehow taken for granted that he would get a good post; and presently he justified his reputation by receiving an invitation to join the staff of a brigade on the eve of embarking for Cuba. No one at Westfield impugned

THE ORCHID

his courage or questioned his patriotism, but some of the women in discussing the matter later agreed that he had to go. Mrs. Cole put it in a nutshell when she said:

“If by any chance Lydia cares for him, she would never have spoken to him again had he remained at home.”

But there were cases, too, of disappointment. Andrew Cunningham, who, in spite of conjugal bonds, was eager to go to the front, was rejected on account of his age and weight, much to his chagrin and to the secret satisfaction of his better-half. Douglas Hale was discarded on the plea of color-blindness, though, as he pathetically informed his acquaintance, the doctor who examined him declared that he had never seen a finer physical specimen in other respects. Hence it will be perceived that

THE ORCHID

there was a nucleus left for the maintenance of a steady fire of conversation at the club-house for the benefit of the stay-at-homes.

At first, in keeping with the course of events, it centred on the possibilities of the destruction of New York, Boston, or Portland by the enemy's fleet; and after that bogey was laid, and the phantom fleet located, it reverted to that ever-fresh topic for controversy, the cause of the blowing up of the *Maine*. Then it turned to Manila, and when the events of that splendid victory had been threshed threadbare, scented trouble with Germany. The victory at Santiago set every tongue a-wagging and raised enthusiasm to fever pitch; but presently the struggles of our poorly rationed troops prompted an inquiry into the merits of General Shafter as a com-

THE ORCHID

mander, and one heard the hum of speculation as to what would have happened if Cervera had not come out when he did.

Some of the members showed themselves positive arsenals of statistics and secret information from the scene of action. Instead of dwelling on his misfortunes at golf, Douglas Hale's shibboleth all summer was the letter which he carried in his pocket from Guy Perry, who had the good fortune to be in the van of the battle of Santiago. This he read to every man or woman of his acquaintance who would let him, and cherished as an historical document which put him in close touch with the authorities at Washington. Andrew Cunningham tried to make the best of his disappointment by showing himself an audible authority on the size and equipment, identity and immediate location of

THE ORCHID

every battle-ship, cruiser, and torpedo-boat in the navy, and as to our future needs to fit us to cope with the naval armaments of the other great powers of the world. As to the women, they were utterly absorbed in making bandages and comfort bags.

Such were the diversions of the spring and early summer. By August the heroes returned from the front and began to reappear on their native heath. Other sporting garb gave place to regimental attire, and, to be in fashion, both men and women wore army slouch hats and suits akin to khaki. One of the first of the Westfield colony to reach home was Guy Perry, looking brown as an Indian from his long exposure to the sun outside the harbor at Santiago. On the day after his return his engagement to Miss Peggy Blake was formally announced, much to the delight of

THE ORCHID

everybody, but to no one's surprise—a fact which slightly dismayed the radiant couple, who were apparently under the delusion that their tryst had been kept a profound secret. They were certainly an attractive-looking pair as they dashed about the country on Guy's dog-cart, proclaiming their good fortune to the world. Peggy's rough rider hat, perched on the back of her head, suited her style of beauty; and as they bubbled over with health and happiness, more than one camera fiend took a shot at them as a charming epitome of the strenuous life.

On the other hand, Kenneth Post returned on a litter, almost a skeleton from fever; and Gerald Marcy, who against his own doctor's advice had finally succeeded in getting stalled in camp in Florida, was limping with rheumatism. Nevertheless,

THE ORCHID

he was able to be about, and, though on ordinary occasions a socially tactful spirit, he did not attempt to conceal his pride at being the only one of the middle-aged men who had succeeded in dodging the authorities and serving his country.

But the hero who brought back the stateliest palm of glory from Cuba was Harry Spencer, for he had his arm in a sling from a flesh wound caused by a Spanish bullet at San Juan Hill, and had been subsequently in the hospital, threatened with blood poisoning. He was emaciated and interesting-looking, so Mrs. Cole, who had a glimpse of him, declared, and he went straight to the small cottage at Westfield where he had spent the previous summer.

Two days subsequent to his return the spirit moved Mrs. Cole to call on Lydia,

THE ORCHID

and on the afternoon of the day she paid this visit it was noticed that she sat pensive and silent while the other women at the club were drinking tea. It was Mrs. Barker who called attention to the circumstance by asking :

“What are you incubating on, Fannie?”

Mrs. Cole hesitated for a moment, then she said tragically, “I am afraid she cares for him.”

No one had to ask who was meant.

“What did I tell you?” exclaimed Mrs. Cunningham.

“What makes you think so?” asked the practical Miss Marbury.

Fannie Cole shook her head. “Not from anything she said. She didn’t mention the subject. It was from what she didn’t say. She made me think of a pent-up volcano.”

THE ORCHID

Proceeding from the intimate source it did, this testimony, though metaphorical, was felt to be most interesting.

"And if the volcano bursts, what will become of poor Herbert?" murmured Mrs. Baxter.

"That's it, of course. Yet it isn't the only thing," responded Mrs. Cole. "What will become of Lydia? What will become of all three of them?" The sociological vista which opened before her was evidently so appalling that she leaned back limply in the straw chair on which she was sitting. But the attitude was productive of philosophy, for she suddenly said with the air of one rhapsodizing, but who nevertheless utters an indictment against Providence:

"If the divinity which shapes our ends really intended Lydia to be happy, why

THE ORCHID

was Harry Spencer allowed to return when he did?" Warming to the vividness of her imagination, she continued briskly, "The ideal course of events would have been this: First, the baby should never have been born; secondly, Herbert Maxwell should have felt an uncontrollable patriotic call to go to the war; he should have fought with distinguished valor and brilliancy—sufficient to inscribe his name on the pages of history—and he should have been shot dead. That would have satisfied him. Then would have been the time for Harry Spencer to come home. With him and Herbert's fortune Lydia might have been radiantly happy. As it is—" Mrs. Cole paused, palsied by the perplexities of reality, and unwilling to venture on prophecy.

But Mrs. Baxter saw fit to finish the

THE ORCHID

sentence for her by a not altogether logical utterance: "As it is, it was Mr. Spencer who went to the war and has come back alive and a hero. If Lydia liked him before, it is of course all the harder for her not to like him now."

Mrs. Cunningham uttered a sort of groan. Then she said emphatically, "There can be but one end to it, in my opinion. Sooner or later she will leave her husband and run away with him."

There was a general nodding of heads—all but Mrs. Cole's.

"And what will they do with that poor baby?" interjected Miss Marbury.

Fannie Cole sat up by way of protest. "My dears," she said with gasping alertness, "that would be comparatively normal, and it cannot be the correct solution. Don't you see it's impossible? Neither of

THE ORCHID

them has any money. If she would, he wouldn't, and neither of them would." She looked around the circle with a smile of triumph, knowing that her stricture was unanswerable.

"I never thought of that," said Mrs. Baxter, voicing the general perplexity.

VI

LATE one afternoon, about a month after, Lydia Maxwell was sitting in her drawing-room at Westfield. An exquisite tea service stood on a table close at hand. But tea had been served. At least the visitor who had been spending the afternoon with her had drunk his and had been gone about ten minutes. Her baby, left by the nurse on the way to her own evening meal, was cooing on the sofa at her side, fended by pillows from toppling over on its head, and provided with the latest novelties in costly toys. The child was now nearly two, and her wardrobe was a credit to her mother's decorative instincts. Lydia enjoyed the combination of the infant and

THE ORCHID

herself and spared no pains to produce an effective picture on all occasions, whether the setting were the drawing-room, a victoria, or a village cart. She counted on mounting Guendolen at the earliest possible day on the tiniest of ponies as a picturesque hunting attendant. Nor had her husband failed to appreciate what an opportunity was here afforded for the artist. Six months earlier he had threatened—the phrase was Lydia's—to have her and baby done by Sargent on his next visit; in fact, Herbert had written to him. The offer had been tempting from the point of view of immortality, but left alone with the child, she had shaken her head and said:

“It would be lovely if it were just right, Guen, but he might take it into his head to form a vicious conception of mamma. And as for you, he couldn't help making

THE ORCHID

you the speaking image of Grandma Maxwell. Living pictures are safest for us, dear, for we can control the canvas."

Now she sat pensive and tense, her hands clasped in her lap. "Why do I love him so?" she murmured under her breath, rebelling against the consciousness which gripped her. Yet in another moment she asserted with the abandonment of one defending his faith against all comers, "But how I do love him!"

A jocund, inarticulate effort at conversation by the child reminded her of its presence. Reaching out her hand, she felt the silky softness of the delicate infantile locks, and then the dainty texture of the frilled dress. Again she said, talking to herself: "The problem is, what will become of you, cherub? You must go with me, of course—if I go."

THE ORCHID

Her baby cooed by way of response. There was a noise in the hall as of someone arriving.

"A visitor for you, Guen," she said. Hurriedly leaning over, she raised her finger as one would to hold the attention of a dancing dog, and gave this cue for imitation.

"Say pa-a-pa—pa-a-pa."

The earlier lessons had been fairly learned, for after a brief struggle the dawning intelligence freed itself in an unequivocal if throaty reproduction of the pious salutation.

"You little pet! Now again."

"Pa-a-pa."

"At last. A sop to Cerberus," Lydia murmured.

The door opened and the master of the house entered. He had just come back

THE ORCHID

from an afternoon ride, and in the few minutes which had elapsed since his return Lydia knew that he had been to the side-board in the dining-room—a man's way of alleviating despondency. His glance, avoiding or ignoring his wife, sought eagerly the object which he expected to find—his infant daughter. This was the bright spot in his day. The baby acknowledged his advent by a crow and by shaking a solid silver rattle. Maxwell, walking across to the other side of the room, sat down and held out his arms invitingly. But Lydia intervened to defer the customary toddling journey in order to exhibit her pupil's latest accomplishment.

“Listen to her now, Herbert,” she said, and gave the necessary signal.

“Pa-a-pa.” The verisimilitude was undeniable.

THE ORCHID

Something very like a groan escaped Maxwell, though his countenance lighted up. Was he thinking how happy he might have been had fate so willed?

The performance was repeated successfully a second time; then the child was despatched on her travels across the carpet. When she ran staggering into her father's arms he folded her to his breast and pressed his lips against the fair, silky tresses. She was accustomed to be thus cuddled by him, though to-night there was an added fervor in his endearments, owing to her efforts at speech. Meanwhile Lydia from her angle of the sofa observed them in demure silence. She had given him an entrancing quarter of an hour, for which she was thankful. Besides, it might put off the evil day—the day of rupture, decision, breaking up of the present anomalous do-

THE ORCHID

mestic relations—which was impending. He had been devoted, forbearing, unselfish, he had lavished on her every luxury, but he was impassible. He did not divert or interest her; his serious side lacked originality; his gayer moods were noisy and deficient in subtlety; the reddish inelegance of his physique repelled her. But what was to be the end? This was the riddle which for diverse reasons she had yet failed to solve. Its solution must depend on the future words of both of them, and she had had no final explanation with either. For the present she would fain have things remain as they were, until she could find the key.

The return of the nurse interrupted Maxwell's happiness. Grudgingly he gave up his treasure. As soon as the child had been carried off, he rose, and standing

THE ORCHID

with his back to the blaze of the wood-fire, which the first sharpness of autumn made agreeable, he faced his wife.

"I met Spencer coming from here."

"He stayed to tea."

"And was here all the afternoon?"

"You know he comes every afternoon."

"And nearly every morning?"

"Yes."

"What is to be the end of this, Lydia?"

She was preparing his tea, which he was accustomed to take after the departure of Guendolen. "How do you wish to have it end?" she asked presently.

"I would have you promise me never to see him again, and to go abroad with me for two years. Let us change the scene entirely. You owe it to me, Lydia, and to our child." This was no new discussion, but he was making one last determined

THE ORCHID

effort to counteract the influences working against him.

"But you know I love him."

"So you have informed me. You have informed me also that it has stopped there."

"It is true. Why, I scarcely know. Perhaps it would have been juster to you if I had left you and gone to him."

"I do not understand."

"No matter, then."

"But you loved me once," he exclaimed resolutely. "That is, you told me so."

"Yes, I told you so. And I did love you as I understood loving then. I liked you, that's what it really was, and I liked the things which a marriage with you brought me."

"You mean you married me for my money?"

THE ORCHID

"I did not know it at the time."

"What do you mean, then?"

Lydia clasped her hands behind her head and leaned back in her seat. "I am trying to be frank with you," she said. "I am trying to make you the only reparation in my power—to let you see me just as I am, just as I see myself. We are what we are. I discovered that long ago."

He caught up this appeal to fatalism with a quicker appreciation of her significance than he was wont to show.

"You need never see this man again unless you choose. You are my wife; I am your husband. Does that stand for nothing?"

"I should choose to see him," she answered with low precision, ignoring the rest. "There is the trouble."

He winced as though from a buffet.

THE ORCHID

"Good God, Lydia, what have I done? Is there anything within my power which you desired which I haven't given you?"

"You have been very generous."

"Generous!" The word evidently galled him. "Do you realize that to regain your love I would gladly sacrifice every dollar of the five million I own?"

For a moment she made no response. The idea of living with a penniless Maxwell was one which she had never entertained, and it made clearer to her the hopelessness of her plight.

"I am not worth it, Herbert," she said gently.

He, too, paused, baffled and at a loss how to proceed. "You are so cold," he asserted with an access of indignation.

"Cold?" The quality of the interroga-

THE ORCHID

tion expressed the incredulity of newly discovered self-knowledge.

“To me.”

“Yes, to you, Herbert.”

He bent his brow upon her. “I suppose if I had devoted myself to some other woman I might not have lost you. I had hints enough from our kind friends, which I ignored because I did not choose to soil our wedlock by such a foul pretense.” His conclusion betrayed the loyalty of his emotions, but there was the sneer of gathering temper in his tone.

Lydia shook her head with a fastidious smile. “With some women that might have been the remedy. It could have made no difference with me.”

“It is not too late yet,” he cried with loud-mouthed menace. “You forget that I am human—that I am a man.”

THE ORCHID

She raised the pages of a book beside her and let them fall gradually. "You must do as you choose about that."

"Then what is the remedy?" he shouted.

"I used an inappropriate word. There is no remedy in our case."

"Lydia, you are goading me to ruin."

Striding up and down the room, he struck his leather breeches smartly with his riding-crop—which he had brought from the hall because the baby liked to play with it—so that they resounded. He halted before his wife and exclaimed hoarsely:

"What are we to do, then?"

She had been warned by feminine innuendoes before marriage of the Maxwell vehemence below the surface, and she perceived that their affairs had reached a crisis.

"Sit down, Herbert, please. I cannot

THE ORCHID

bear noise. If we are to arrange matters, we must talk quietly in order to decide what is really best under all the circumstances."

He gave an impatient twist to his head. "I wish you to know that I am master here after this," he announced. Nevertheless, he walked to the chair near the fireplace, which he had first occupied, and sitting down, folded his arms.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"To begin with, Herbert, there is no escape for either of us from this calamity. And you must not suppose that I do not realize how dreadful it is for us both. So far as there is fault, it is mine. I ought never to have married you. But the past is the past; I do not love you now; I can never love you again."

"One way out of it," he said between his

THE ORCHID

teeth, "would be to kill the man you do love."

"How would that avail?"

"I have thought more than once of shooting him down like a dog," he blurted.

Lydia shook her head. "You never could do that when it came to the point. And in case of a duel, he is more handy than you. Besides, who fights duels nowadays? And think of the newspapers! You know as well as I that such a thing is out of the question—on Guen's account if for no other reason. It would be blazoned all over the country."

"On Guen's account! Why did you not think of her before you sacrificed us both?"

She looked back at him unruffled. "I am thinking of her now," she replied with her finished modulation. "I have told you I am what I am."

THE ORCHID

“Do not repeat that shallow sophistry,” he exclaimed fiercely. “You are what you choose to be.” But in the same breath he fell back in his seat with the air of one confounded. Then, resting his elbow on the arm of the chair and his cheek on his hand, he gazed at her from under his reddish, beetling brows as one might gaze at the sphinx. “What, then, do you suggest?” he asked wearily.

Lydia had shrugged her shoulders at his last stricture. Now raising again the cover of the book beside her and letting the leaves slip through her fingers, she replied slowly, “I suppose if you were a foreign husband you would accept the inevitable and console yourself as best you could. We should go our respective ways and ask no questions. I should be discreet and—and things would re-

THE ORCHID

main as they are so far as Guen is concerned."

"I see. But I am an American husband, and, though they have the reputation of being the most accommodating in the world, they draw the line at such an arrangement as you suggest."

"I thought very likely that you would. Then we must separate. Sooner or later, I suppose, you will be entitled to a divorce, if you wish it."

There was a pause. "Where will you go?" he asked in a hollow tone.

"I have not thought," she answered.

It was the truth. Clever and discerning as she was, she had put off the inevitable from day to day, basking in the glamour of the present. What would her lover say? Would he be ready to venture all for her sake? to throw convention to the winds

THE ORCHID

and glory in their passion? She did not know; she had never asked him. They had never discussed the future. She needed time—time to think and time to ascertain. Then a sudden thought seized her, and she spoke:

“I shall take Guen.”

“Guen?” There were agony and revolting consternation in his exclamation.

“I am her mother. She is a mere baby. Am I not her natural guardian?”

He sprang to his feet. “I should not permit it!” he thundered. “I should go to law; I should appeal to the courts.”

Her wits showed themselves her allies. “But if you drive me from this house, the courts will give her to me,” she said triumphantly. “What, after all, have I done? You are jealous, and you dismiss me. They will let me have my baby.”

THE ORCHID

The horror inspired by her cool, confident declaration choked his utterance. He raised his riding crop in his clenched fist as though he were impelled to strike her. "You—you—" he articulated, but no suitable stigma was evolved by his seething brain. His arm fell, but he stood with set teeth and bristling mien, like a wild boar at bay.

His fury had the effect of enhancing Lydia's appearance of calm. "There is no use in getting excited. I'm only telling you what is likely to happen if we have recourse to desperate measures. She's a girl, and I brought her into the world—had all the stress of doing so. Why shouldn't I have her? I've heard lawyers say that when parents separate the courts consider what is for the best good of the children. Surely it is for the best good of a baby girl of



"I should not permit it!" he thundered. "I should go to law;
I should appeal to the courts."

THE ORCHID

two that she should go with her mother. That's the modern social view, Herbert, and a man has to make the best of it."

As she proceeded Lydia had warmed to the plausible justice of her argument. Recognizing that she had put herself in the best possible position for the time being, she rose to go. Maxwell, gnawing at his lips, stood pondering her dire words. The appalling intimation that he might lose his precious child had numbed his senses with dread. He knew his wife's cleverness, and that there must be some truth in her statement. Might she not even at the moment be premeditating an attempt to carry her away? Every other thought became at once subordinate to his resolve to safeguard his treasure. As though he suspected that his wife had risen under a crafty impulse to get the start of him, he

THE ORCHID

blocked her pathway by stepping between her and the door.

"I forbid you to touch her," he said frowningly. "She shall never leave this house. I am going to give my orders now and they will be obeyed."

Maxwell stood for a moment as though waiting to see what response this challenge would elicit, then, with a forbidding nod, he strode from the room and shut the door after him.

His departure was a relief to Lydia. All she had desired was to be alone. She dropped again upon the sofa and sat looking into space. There was only one course: she must have an understanding with Harry Spencer. What would he say? What was he prepared to do for her sake? She thought to herself, "He said once that my time would come. It has come, and,

THE ORCHID

as he prophesied, I am just like the others—only more so. More so because they might be ready to give him up; they might not have the courage to persevere and sacrifice everything else for the one thing which is worth while—love. And I thought it would never come—that I was cold, as Herbert says, and likely to be bored all my life. Now, against my creed, against my will it has come, and I cannot do without him.” For a moment she sat in reverie, then murmuring, “I must know—and the sooner the better,” she stepped to the desk with an impulsive movement and wrote.

VII

LYDIA'S note was a summons to Spencer to go to drive with her on the following morning. When he arrived she was ready with her village cart and a fast cob. Regardless of appearances, her project was to seek some distant spot where they would not be interrupted. The woods near Duck Pond—in which they had passed pleasant hours together twice already—commended themselves to her, and thither she directed their course under the mellow October sunshine. She spoke of their jaunt as a picnic, the edible manifestations of which she disclosed to him stowed in neat packages behind. But she vouchsafed no immediate explanation of the true purpose of

THE ORCHID

this impromptu expedition. She was bidding her time until they should walk together in the sylvan paths, free from all danger of interference. Since matters were approaching a climax, she was glad also to give herself up for the moment to the glamour of sitting at his side and realizing their affinity. Of all the men of her acquaintance he was the only one who had never bored her; who seemed to divine and cater to her moods; who amused her when she craved entertainment, and was alive to the precious value of opportune silence. He seemed to her possessed of infinite tact—and Lydia experienced an increasing repugnance when her social sensibilities were jarred. That had been one great trouble with Maxwell; he was forever doing the right thing in the wrong way. His very endearments were awkward, whereas her

THE ORCHID

present companion's slightest gallantry gave a pleasant fillip to her blood.

Spencer, on his part, was quite content to ask no questions. He was with the woman who exercised a subtler and more permanent fascination over him than any one he had hitherto met, not excepting Miss Wilford, and this drive was only cumulative proof of favor on her part, one more sign that their relations were approaching a crisis. What the precise and ultimate result of their growing intimacy was to be he had not felt the need to consider. For the moment it sufficed to know that, though both her partiality for him and his influence over her were unmistakable, she had up to this point kept him at bay—eluded him when she seemed on the point of throwing herself into his arms. This skilful restraint on her part had

THE ORCHID

served to heighten the interest of his pursuit, and also to deepen the ardor of his attachment.

Before they had gone beyond the limits of Westfield several of their mutual acquaintance were encountered, all of whom were too well-bred to betray the vivid interest which the meeting aroused. Mrs. Cole, on her way to play golf at the club, nodded to them blithely from her phaeton, as though it were the most natural thing in the world they should be together, and so concealed from them her dire suspicions which were thus afforded fresh material to batten on. Gerald Marcy, sportsman-like and dignified on his grizzled hunter, saluted them with the off-hand decorum of a man of the world.

"Glorious weather for man and beast," he asserted, as much as to say that he knew

THE ORCHID

how to mind his own business. When they had passed him, however, he tugged nervously at his mustache and wagged his head like a soothsayer.

The newly engaged couple, sitting side by side in a village cart of similar pattern to theirs, managed to conceal that they did not know which way to look, and sustained the ordeal creditably, though the girl was conscious that her cheeks were flushing. As they left the culprits behind, Peggy clutched her lover's arm and whispered hoarsely, "Did you see that?"

"It's too bad," said Guy, who, being neither blind nor imbecile, had not failed to take in the full import of the situation. "I for one am all in the dark as to how this thing is going to end."

"I knew they would be great friends, but

THE ORCHID

I never supposed for a minute that it would come to anything like this," mused the maiden sadly. "Even when she chaperoned us that night I took for granted it was nothing really serious."

Mrs. Gordon Wallace, who, being a new-comer from the West, was less of an adept, perhaps, in disguising her real feelings, put up her eye-glass a little feverishly as she bowed. Whereupon it pleased Lydia to whisk her head round a moment later.

"She was staring after us with all her eyes!" she exclaimed. "I knew she would; she couldn't resist the temptation. She will report that I have a guilty conscience, whereas I was merely studying human nature in violation of my own social instincts."

"What did she see, after all?" queried

THE ORCHID

Spencer, supposing that his companion stood in need of a little soothing.

"Everyone is talking about us, as you know," Lydia answered, ignoring the query. "We have been for months the burning topic at Westfield, and the fame of our misdeeds has spread abroad. Everything considered, people have been wonderfully forbearing to our faces—perfect moles, in fact—but behind our backs they are chattering like magpies. Fannie Cole intimated as much, though I had guessed it."

"Why need we care what they say?" he asked sedulously. What better opportunity would he have than this for feeling his way? "We know that there have been no misdeeds."

She touched the horse with the tip of her whip, and he bounded forward. "Is it not

THE ORCHID

the prince of misdeeds that we love one another?" she said after a moment.

"We cannot help that."

"But since it is true, what are we going to do about it, my friend?"

"Do? Lydia," he whispered eagerly and bent his cheek toward hers, "it is for you to say."

She recoiled chastely from his endearment, though she thrilled at the proximity. "Is it? I am not sure. I asked you to come with me this morning in order to find out. It appears that we have reached the parting of the ways."

"The parting?" he queried apprehensively.

"Not for us, unless we choose."

"Ah." It was the sigh of an ardent lover.

"Wait. I will tell you by and by when

THE ORCHID

we can talk it out freely.” She turned and smiled on him with an effulgent grace such as she had never in her life lavished on Maxwell. Therein she threw wide open for a moment the casement of her soul and let him perceive the completeness of the havoc he had wrought.

“You angel!” he answered, breathing softly, and he pressed her hand. He divined that her dainty spirit was in the mood when all it asked of him was his presence, and that speech would be a discord.

They were passing now beyond the confines of Westfield and the influence of its colony into a more distinctly rural country—stretches of wilder uplands, now pastures, now woods, alternating with small farm buildings around which the fields lay stubbly with the party-colored remains of the harvest, and redolent of autumn odors.

THE ORCHID

Presently they reached a village with a shady main street and old-fashioned white-faced houses, most of the treasures of which, quaint andirons and other picturesque relics of a simpler past, had been sent to market owing to the lure of fancy prices. Then more fields, and at length they branched off from the main road along a winding lane, on either side of which the view was partially shut off by clusters of bushes gay with the colors of the changing season. The perfume of the wild flowers was in the air, and everywhere the blazon of the golden-rod was visible.

They had exchanged an occasional word of comment on the sights and sounds of the varying landscape, yet wholly impersonal. Now once more she turned toward him with the same lustrous smile, and said, like one exalted:

THE ORCHID

"Love and the world are mine to-day."

Thrilled by this confession of faith, he looked into her eyes ardently, and encircling her waist sought to draw her toward him.

"And they will be mine when you are mine. You must be mine; you shall be mine."

She freed herself from his grasp. "Patience, my friend." Her voice had the tantalizing exultation of an elusive fay. "What should I gain by that? Would you love me any more than you do now?"

"Yes, yes indeed," he answered, disregarding logic.

"I doubt it much," she asserted archly. "But wait."

On they went, and finally the bushes along the winding lane became trees and

THE ORCHID

the sky above their heads was obscured by patches of foliage. They were in an expanse of woods which, in spite of the proximity of civilization, still smacked of luxuriant and elfish nature. The road, though yet wide enough for a vehicle, wound gracefully between oaks and pines stately with age. Some reverent hand had protected them. Their trunks were scarred with weird growths, and on the carpet of the soil big fungi flourished unmolested. It was a wild region to the imaginative and uninitiated, yet there were evidences now and again of the nearness of man and his devices, such as an occasional sign-post or rustic seat. After half a mile of travel over a soft brown carpet sprinkled with fragrant pine needles they brought up at their destination, a sort of sylvan camp—a picnic-ground in reality, a favorite resort

THE ORCHID

of the masses in midsummer. Now it was deserted for the season.

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang,

though the simile was applicable to the dismantled wooden buildings rather than to the face of nature. The band-stand and eating pavilion stood like starving ghosts amid the forest mysteries. But there was a hitching-post at hand. Lydia knew her locality, and after the willing cob had been secured and blanketed, she led the way down a short vista to an arbor or summer house, to which clustering vines still imparted some semblance of vernal cosiness. The view from it commanded through a narrow clearing a picturesque outlook on the glistening waters of Duck Pond, while the crackling underbrush furnished a cordon of alert sentinels. On the

THE ORCHID

rustic bench, where many inelegant predecessors had carved their initials, there was ample room for two. Nor was it the first time this pair had made use of it. Settling herself in her corner with folded arms so as to face her companion, Lydia broke the silence.

“Herbert says we cannot go on as we are.”

“He has intimated as much several times before.”

“But this time he is in earnest. He has put down his foot. He introduced the subject yesterday after you had gone. I told him again the truth—the truth he already knew—that I love you, and not him, and that I can never love him.” She paused. Was it to pique his curiosity, or was she feeling her way while she revelled for the moment in her declaration?

THE ORCHID

He accepted her avowal complacently as a twice-told tale, but he was interested obviously in what was to follow.

"Well?"

"He declines absolutely to be accommodating and resign himself to the situation. The customary foreign point of view in such a case does not appeal to him. When it came to the point I never supposed it would."

"We were getting along so nicely, too. What brought this on?" Spencer remarked parenthetically. The triangular footing had been submitted to by Maxwell for so many months without an outbreak that the logic of events seemed to him to demand some special incident as a justification for this sudden revolt.

"One can never tell when a volcano will assert itself. He simply exploded, that's

THE ORCHID

all," she answered. "The wonder is that he has put up with it so long."

"And what is it that he requires?"

"He implored me never to see you again and to go abroad with him for two years. When I declined, he said that he and I must separate."

"A divorce?"

"We did not discuss precise terms. The idea uppermost in his mind was much less complex than that. He invited me to leave the house."

Spencer made an ejaculation of astonishment. "At once?"

"That was his meaning."

"And what did you reply?" Under the spur of her disclosure he had risen. Resting his arm on one of the spiky knobs of the rustic pillar in front of him, he looked down at her inquiringly. Yet his long,

THE ORCHID

athletic, indolent figure still shrank from the conclusion that the status of their affairs had been permanently disturbed.

"I managed not to commit myself at the moment." She paused briefly. "I desired to talk with you first, Harry. I felt that I must know what you would like me to do."

He straightened himself as from surprise. "I could not like you to do that—leave the house."

"It would only be possible provided I went to you."

For a moment he seemed dumfounded. "From his house to me? But, Lydia"—the boldness of the proposition was so staggering to Spencer, he felt that he must have misunderstood her, and was groping for her meaning. His consternation was evidently not unexpected, nor did

THE ORCHID

it elicit reproach. "No one would call on me, of course," she said dryly. Then she added with cumulating tenseness, as one pleading a cause which she suspects to be hopeless, "It would mean the end of everything else in the world which I care for except one—my love for you. We could leave this place forever, Harry, go to Australia, the world's end, wherever you will, and be happy."

A scampering squirrel with a nut in its mouth hopped into view on the path, scanned them for an instant, then bounded into the underbrush. But only just in time. It seemed to Spencer that the little animal was grinning at him, and he had reached for a missile as an outlet for his doubly harassed feelings.

"My dear girl, you are crazy."

"Very likely, Harry."

THE ORCHID

"I love you to distraction, God knows, but that sort of thing is out of date. Why, Lydia, you would be the first to tire of it. Happy? We should neither of us be happy, for what would we have to live on?" The final inflection of his voice was veritable triumph, so irrefutable appeared his logic.

Lydia gave a profound sigh. "I knew you would say that," she answered quickly. "But it was our only chance. Suppose I get my divorce and we marry here, what have we to live on? I have three thousand a year of my own. And you?"

"Not quite so much—assured."

"Exactly. And there you are!—as Henry James's characters are so fond of saying."

They gazed at each other mutely.

"We should be beggars with our tastes,"

THE ORCHID

she resumed. "It would never do, would it, dear? You see, I have considered the subject."

"I perceive that you have." The pensiveness of his tone was a virtual admission that he had failed to recognize how subtle she had been.

"The other was our only chance," she repeated. "I would have gone with you, probably, if you had consented."

"But I do consent, if you wish it," he asserted eagerly; and falling on his knee he reached for her hand and pressed it to his lips. For the first time in his life he had yielded to the intoxication of love against his reason. The charm of this elusive, chameleon-like being had got the better for the moment both of his discretion and his inherent selfishness.

Though the capitulation entranced

THE ORCHID

Lydia, it had come too slowly and too late. She shook her head. "It is you who have convinced *me*. You are perfectly right. I should tire without things—of living on next to nothing. It would be impossible. You knew me better than I did myself." She freed her hand gently from his blandishments and smiled in his face.

He rose and looked down at her again from the rustic pillar. "We might manage somehow. I should be ready to try." He was nerved for the sacrifice.

"On six thousand? Oh, no, you wouldn't. At any rate, I should not."

It was futile to pretend that it would be adequate. "We might live abroad. Things are cheaper there," he suggested.

"But I don't wish to live abroad. I wish to remain here, and I could not hold up my head on much less than I have now,

THE ORCHID

for, under the circumstances, no one would call on us if we were poor."

He showed that he saw the point, but it suited her to enlarge upon it. "If one has millions and good manners one can do anything in America; everything else is forgiven. But I would never put myself in the position where I might be snubbed or pitied. That's why I must be rich. And as for you, Harry," she continued, "unless you had a stable, steam yacht, and at least two establishments, you would feel, after you had cooled off, that you had thrown yourself away, and, consequently, we should both be miserable."

He laughed a little sceptically, but he did not deny the impeachment. "What a clever woman you are, Lydia! That's one reason I love you so. The thing to do," he said in his caressing voice, "is to prevent

THE ORCHID

matters from reaching the desperate stage. You must patch it up somehow with Maxwell, and—and we shall find ways to see each other,” he added meaningly.

She appeared not to hear his suggestion. “One million is the very least that you and I could marry on—and be perfectly happy. And, if we had it, we might be very happy.”

Her sigh of regret encouraged his alert warmth. He leaned toward her and whispered, “Let us, then, be happy in the only way which is possible.”

She raised a warning hand. It was clear that she had understood his previous innuendo. “To be happy under the rose is respectable abroad, but here it may mean social ostracism,” she replied demurely. “I tell you that Herbert is dreadfully in earnest. Besides,” she added after one of

THE ORCHID

her deliberate pauses, "Do you not love me? That is what I crave. That is the essential thing for me."

"You are mocking me," he said with choler.

"No; only showing myself conservative and sensible like yourself. Neither of us can afford to sacrifice everything, yet it would be infinitely preferable to live together. You must find our million."

Spencer shrugged his shoulders. "Where? In the stock-market? One plunge, and drink wormwood if I lost? I will make you listen to me yet," he said with the rising energy of one who feels himself at bay. His eyes gleamed ardently, and the lines of his dark countenance, little accustomed to brook opposition, grew rigid as they did in the moments when he

THE ORCHID

concentrated all his nerves on accomplishment.

The charm of his mastering mood was not lost on Lydia, but its effect was to fix her wits still more closely on the problem of their future. Where was the necessary escape or remedy to be found? She lifted her eyes to meet her lover's gaze, but they stared beyond him into the realm of speculation. Suddenly she started as one who sees a spectre—something weird and forbidden. Yet her stricken vision seemed to gather fascination from a longer look, and she moved her lips as though she were bandying words with doubts which fell like nine-pins before her intelligence. Then, with a transport which revealed that she had taken the intruder, however terrible, to her breast as the bringer of a dispensation, she exclaimed:

THE ORCHID

"Harry, I have found a way."

"A way?" he ejaculated, for to him there now seemed only one course open consistent with their necessities, and he feared some radical proposal as the outcome of her trance.

"For us to marry. We shall have enough."

"Where is the gold mine?" he asked indulgently.

She looked at him musingly with bright, searching eyes. In that moment she concluded not to reveal her secret. "Yes, a gold mine," she answered. "We shall have our million—perhaps two. Why not two?" She asked the question of herself, and it was plain that she saw no stable obstacle to her now widening ambition.

Meanwhile Spencer surveyed her with scrutinizing wonder. Evidently her trans-

THE ORCHID

port was genuine. He knew her too well to doubt that there was some basis for her specific statement as to the money.

“Two would be better than one, Lydia. Let it be two, by all means,” he said jauntily.

“It shall be two,” she replied with the assurance of a necromancer confident of compelling respect for his magic wand by the performance of the marvels he has foretold. “You may kiss me, Harry—once.”

VIII

THE nuptials between Guy Perry and Miss Peggy Blake took place the following summer—midway in June, the month of brides. They were married in the little Episcopal church at Westfield, which since the advent of the colony and of millionnaires had thriven like the traditional bay tree, for most of the sporting element belonged, nominally at least, to that fashionable persuasion. Hence the rector, the Rev. Percy Ward, who had assumed this cure of souls with modest expectations regarding numbers and revenues, had been pleasantly astonished by the rapid increase in both. This had not made him proud, but appropriately ambitious. It had allowed him

THE ORCHID

to keep the appearance and properties of the church up to the mark, æsthetically speaking, by vines, flowers and fresh paint, and at the proper moment it had encouraged him to ask for a new house of worship adapted to the needs of his growing congregation. Success had crowned his efforts. Plans were being drawn for an artistic and sufficiently spacious building to take the place of the rustic quarters in use. But the bride had expressed herself as devoutly thankful that she could be married in the original building, for she had pious associations with it, and its smaller proportions seemed to her more in keeping with a country wedding. For Peggy desired that the ceremony should be an out-of-door affair. She had even thought at first of being married under a bell of roses on her father's lawn. Yet, when it came to the

THE ORCHID

point she adhered to a ceremony in church. She wished to be wedded to her true love as securely as possible, consequently she invoked for the purpose full religious rites at the altar, but her energies respecting the other features of the occasion were bent on the production of open-air effects. They were to be simple and rurally picturesque.

The guests of the happy pair endeavored to comply with the wishes of the bride consistently with regard for their own personal appearance. That is, the women came in light summer attire, but with frocks of fascinating shades, and straw hats of the latest dainty design with gay feathers. The little church was packed to the doors, and on the green fronting the vestibule stood those of the men for whom there was no room inside. The leading members of the hunt were in pink, at Peggy's suggestion;

THE ORCHID

among them Andrew Cunningham with an immaculate stock and a new waistcoat of festal pattern. It was a radiant, rare June day; not a cloud was in the sky. The ceremony went off without a hitch save the momentary hesitation occasioned by the bridegroom's diving into the wrong pocket for the ring. All Peggy's family had expressed fears lest her veil should fall off in keeping with her tendencies, so it had been more than securely pinned to forestall such a calamity. She walked, on her father's arm, modestly yet firmly up the aisle as became a strenuous spirit; her responses were agreeably audible; and on her way down, though she obeyed the instructions given her to keep her eyes straight ahead—on the ball, as one of her friends had cautioned her—it was clear from her blissful, confident expression

THE ORCHID

that she found difficulty in not nodding to her friends right and left by way of letting them know how happy she was. She was dressed as nearly like a village maiden as prevailing fashions in wedding garments would allow, and the simplicity of her garb set off her fine physique and hue of health, which not even the conventional pallor of brides was able wholly to dispel. Four bridesmaids tripped behind her, the picture of dainty shepherdesses.

On reaching the portal, however, Mrs. Peggy was unable to repress her exuberance; and, before jumping into the carriage which was to carry them to the breakfast at "Valley Farm," her father's residence, she grasped and shook ecstatically a half dozen of the nearest hands. Then as the vehicle containing the happy pair rolled away, while the bride threw a kiss to the group of

THE ORCHID

friends at the door, the swell of a horn rose melodiously above other sounds, and along the meadow flanking one side of the foreground the pack of hounds belonging to the Westfield Hunt came into view headed by the Master, and every hound wore a wedding favor. This feature had been devised as a surprise to the couple and a tribute to their devotion to equestrian sport. Besides, it had a special touch of interest for the women in that everyone knew that Kenneth Post, the Master, would fain have been in the shoes of the fortunate bridegroom. Yet he played his part with so much dignity and spirit, as he led the way toward their destination, that the contagion of his demeanor spread to the entire retinue of guests which followed in their various equipages and the omnibuses or so-called "barges" provided, and

THE ORCHID

the procession swept along on the wings of gayety.

In the midst of the confusion of getting away, the pole of pretty Mrs. Baxter's village cart was broken through collision with the champing steeds bearing the phaeton containing Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Wallace. Among the many proffers of succor the first and most acceptable emanated from Mrs. Walter Cole, who had obviously a spare seat in her neat oak station wagon. The fact was that Mrs. Cole's husband, having been detained in town by pressing business, had telephoned his wife at the last moment to go without him to the ceremony, and that he would follow by the next train. Consequently she had arrived only barely in time to get a seat, and that by dint of crowding the pew a little.

She had sat there as in a trance, unable to

THE ORCHID

fasten her attention on the charming spectacle as fixedly as it deserved. Her mind kept wandering elsewhere; reverting to certain amazing news of which she had become possessed only the afternoon before, and which she had had no opportunity to impart to the many who would be thrilled by it. She was revelling in the thought of the sensation it would produce, and her own intelligence was agreeably busy with the clever novelty of the procedure and with trying to decide whether, in spite of the heartlessness displayed, the solution devised was not perhaps the best under the peculiar circumstances. She had felt that she should burst if she could not tell some kindred soul soon; but such an astounding piece of information was not to be wasted on people whose faculties were already fully occupied; it merited a single mind.

THE ORCHID

Therefore the moment she became aware of Mrs. Baxter's mishap, she exclaimed with almost hysterical eagerness:

"Rachel, there's a seat for you here. Do come with me; I'm all alone."

When the invitation was accepted, Mrs. Cole pressed her hand and leaned back with a happy mien. There was no use in speaking until they were free from the concourse and were sweeping along the road toward "Valley Farm." That auspicious moment having arrived, she turned to her friend and said:

"Well, dear, the mystery is solved."

"About Lydia?" asked Mrs. Baxter with breathless animation.

"Yes. She sent for me as soon as she returned. I went to town to see her yesterday."

"Where has she been all this time?"

THE ORCHID

“Nominally, as we were told, travelling in Mexico for two months with her cousins; in reality coming to terms with Maxwell in regard to a divorce.”

“Then they are really to be divorced? How pitiful! But I suppose it was the only solution. Do go on, dear,” she added, fearing lest this crude philosophic digression might be the reason for the pause on Mrs. Cole’s part.

But the narrator, though she regarded the comment as superficial, was merely arranging her material with a view to dramatic effect.

“We had a heart-to-heart talk. She told me everything. She wishes people to know—and to try to understand her point of view. Yes, Rachel, they are to be divorced. The papers are already filed. The lawyers say that it is simple enough, if both the par-

THE ORCHID

ties are agreed, and it seems they are—all three of the parties rather. The court proceedings will be as secret as possible. Herbert is to let her obtain it from him—for cruel and abusive treatment or gross and confirmed habits of intoxication—to save Lydia's reputation on the child's account. Then Lydia is to marry Harry Spencer and live happily ever after—if she can."

"She never would have been happy with Maxwell," remarked Mrs. Baxter pensively. "Poor fellow! When one reflects that he probably was never cruel or abused her in his life, and that his confirmed habits, if he has them, are due to her neglect! What is to become of him?"

Mrs. Cole had been waiting for some such question. "The law is queer, you know," she said, by way of disposing of the rest of the plaint. Then she added,

THE ORCHID

with significant emphasis, "He is to have Guen."

"Altogether?"

"Altogether. That is the way Lydia got him to consent to a divorce."

Not being so clever as some women, Mrs. Baxter looked puzzled. "I don't think I quite understand."

Mrs. Cole, who was enjoying thoroughly the gradual climax, sat upright, and facing her companion laid her hand on Mrs. Baxter's arm.

"Rachel," she said, "Lydia has sold Guendolen to her husband for two million dollars!"

Mrs. Baxter gave a gasp and a smothered shriek. "Two million dollars! The poor, dear child!"

The two ejaculations were not entirely consistent, for they revealed a divided in-

THE ORCHID

terest. Mrs. Cole proceeded to face the second first.

"I've thought it all over and over,—I did not sleep until four, I was so excited—and there can't be any doubt that, under the circumstances, it's the best thing for the child. Her father dotes on her, and Lydia never has been able to forget that she is the living image of his mother. It was probably a struggle—she intimated as much—for it sounds so revolting, and a woman is supposed to be a lioness where her own flesh and blood are concerned. But when it came to a choice between Guen and Harry Spencer, she chose the one she cared for most."

"And she really gets two millions? Why, she will be as rich as before."

"Exactly. That's one of the interesting phases of the case. You see, they

THE ORCHID

couldn't afford to marry, for neither of them had any money to speak of, though they were dead in love with each other. On the other hand, they had never done anything—so Lydia swears, and I believe her—which would entitle Herbert Maxwell to a divorce; so when Herbert invited her to leave the house, she replied that she would, and that she would take Guendolen with her. It just happened to occur to her, but the effect was marvellous. It enabled her to hold over Herbert's head the menace that, when parents who can't get on agree to separate, the courts are likely to give a baby girl to the mother, and oblige the father to be content with occasional reasonable visits. That frightened Herbert nearly to death. It seems he raged like a bull—poor man!—and threatened to shoot anyone who laid a fin-

THE ORCHID

ger on the child. Now comes the really clever part," continued Mrs. Cole, with an appreciative sigh. "Lydia had threatened to take Guen merely to gain time to think, but when she realized that she and Harry Spencer could never be happy unless she were willing to lead what the newspapers call a double life, she was at her wits' end. Then the idea suddenly occurred to her, and—horrible as it was at the first glance—it seemed the solution of everything. So she engaged a lawyer to open negotiations with her husband, and she went away to Mexico to give Herbert a chance to think over the proposal. She lived in terror of centipedes while she was gone, but there were lots of interesting old relics there, and one day she got a telegram from her lawyer announcing that the whole thing was settled. The necessary papers have

THE ORCHID

been drawn, and as soon as the divorce is granted she will get the money. What do you think of that? Isn't it original and revolting, and yet, seeing that she is Lydia, comprehensible? And the most extraordinary thing of all is that, when one considers the matter dispassionately, it is not clear that it isn't the most sensible arrangement all round."

Rachel Baxter, being of a less philosophical turn of mind, was still aghast.

"What will people say?" she added naively, as one in monologue. "Of course, they have their money."

"They have their money, and Lydia proposes to come back here as soon as she has—er—changed husbands. That's just like her, too. She intends that Westfield shall treat her precisely as though nothing had happened."

THE ORCHID

"Really!" Mrs. Baxter's surprise showed a touch of consternation. "It will be very awkward, won't it? Though, after all," she murmured, "it isn't anything criminal, like—" She found difficulty in hitting on an appropriate simile. Meanwhile Mrs. Cole added, dispassionately:

"She would have come to-day, but she felt that she might be thought indelicate, considering that it is a wedding, and that her own affairs are still at sixes and sevens so far as appearances go. But she sent her love to Peggy."

At the moment they were dashing up the driveway of "Valley Farm." Mrs. Baxter, who had been nursing her emotions as one whose ethical sensibilities had received a blow in the solar plexus, made this attempt at a summary:

THE ORCHID

"It is diabolical, but interesting. I wonder what people will say."

No time was lost by either of them in spreading the abnormal news. But it suited pretty Mrs. Baxter's temperament better to follow in her companion's wake, supplementing the narrative by ingenuous cooing speeches rather than by an independent excursion. They joined at first the procession of guests making snail-like progress toward the bride and groom, who were holding court in the drawing-room of the decorative modern mansion built for occupation from May to December. As chance would have it, they found themselves next in line behind Mrs. Andrew Cunningham, into whose ear Fannie Cole, bending forward, whispered simply the fell words:

"Lydia has sold Guendolen to her hus-

THE ORCHID

band for two million dollars, and is to marry Harry Spencer on the proceeds as soon as the divorce is granted."

The mother of the hunt made no sign for a moment, like one stunned. Then, as comprehension of the facts dawned upon her, the blood mounted to her face so that the crab-apples in her cheeks were very much in evidence, and she bounced completely round.

"That caps the climax! That is the most up-to-date, highly evolved performance yet. Who told you?" The sardonic ire in her voice was formidable.

"Lydia—yesterday."

Incredulity snatching at the chance of exaggeration was thus baffled. "It's monstrous! I shall never speak to her again."

Appalled by the bluntness of the threat, Mrs. Baxter interposed naively, "But she

THE ORCHID

is going to live here after she is married."

"So much the better." Whereupon Mrs. Cunningham turned her back upon them, in search of her husband, to whom she felt the urgent need of imparting the information.

Mrs. Cole nodded her head, as much as to say that she understood the point of view, but her perspicuous philosophy prompted her to take a much broader view of the situation.

"It's dreadful, May, of course, and disconcerting to maternal notions," she began; "but—" Then realizing that for the moment the indignant censor was otherwise occupied, she decided to reserve her ameliorating comments for a more favorable opportunity than the promiscuous line afforded. After all, the episode was not

THE ORCHID

meat for babes, and undeniably deserved more than flippant treatment.

The news thus unbosomed spread like wildfire. After kissing the bride, Mrs. Cole, during her progress to the piazza and lawn, where many of the guests were beginning to partake of refreshments appropriate to the occasion, had the satisfaction of throwing it like a bombshell into successive groups; while the Cunninghams lost no time in revealing what they had heard. Wherever it was uttered it took the place of every other topic, so that presently all the adults and many of the minors of the company were feverishly discussing the social drama presented.

The course of the wedding breakfast, thus enlivened, proceeded according to programme. It was a felicitous scene, what with the balmy, brilliant day, the brightly

THE ORCHID

dressed assembly, and the picturesque addition of the pack of hounds, which danced attendance at a respectful distance within proper limits previously prepared for them. After everybody had congratulated the happy pair, they showed themselves at an angle of the piazza to cut the wedding-cake which stood festal and massive on an adjacent table.

Then at the proper moment the bride's health was proposed by Gerald Marcy with dignity and grace, in pledge of which everybody's glass of champagne was lifted and drained. The bridegroom, goaded into speech, made a few halting remarks expressive of his own happiness and good fortune, ending in a serious tag of chivalrous, if slightly involved, sentiment, which evoked fresh enthusiasm.

Toasts were drunk to the bridesmaids,

THE ORCHID

the parents of the bride, and the Hunt Club. In response to the last of these Mrs. Baxter's brother, Dick Weston, who possessed a deep-toned voice, started the club-song, the words of which had been composed by Andrew Cunningham in his salad days under the inspiration of five Scotches and soda, and been adopted on the occasion of its first delivery as the property of the colony:

Across the uplands brown we ride,
And our pulses bound with life's ruddy tide,
As we follow the hounds o'er the country-side
In the brisk October morning.

So he sang, and everybody joined in the refrain with genial gusto, not excepting the bride—"Miss West Wind" still, in spite of her veil and satin attire—who waved her glass and carolled with the rest, until even the hounds seemed to catch the

THE ORCHID

infection and added their notes to the general jubilation. Then it transpired that stout Miss Marbury had found the ring in her piece of wedding-cake. This was the source of some merriment, amid which the bride slipped away to change her dress, and the guests, left to their own devices, returned to their discussion of the half-digested news.

Gerald Marcy, who had heard it, like everybody else, with mingled revolt and bewilderment, passed from his functions as toast-master to what might be called the storm-centre of the animadversion, a small summer-house or arbor on the trellis of which June roses were blowing, and where the Andrew Cunninghams, Mrs. Cole, the Rev. Percy Ward, and several others were congregated. He arrived just as the rector was exclaiming, with pained fervor:

THE ORCHID

"We have here the logical fruits of the present-day degenerate readiness to put off one husband or wife in order to marry another. If every clergyman in the land were to bind himself never to perform the marriage service in the case of any recently divorced person, some headway might be made against this social pest—the canker-worm of modern family life."

The symbolic allusion to canker-worms caused nimble-minded Mrs. Cole to glance up involuntarily at the vines to meet some impending danger to her summer finery at the same moment that she replied:

"I don't think it would make much difference, if you'll pardon my saying so, Mr. Ward—with Lydia, I mean. She would be content with a justice of the peace if a clergyman were not forthcoming. But," she continued, with increasing volubility,

THE ORCHID

“what, of course, you wish to know is whether there is anything which will keep people of our sort—not the wives of the toiling masses whose husbands beat them and who feel that they ought to be allowed to solace themselves with a second, but the four hundred, so to speak, and their friends—from trifling with the marriage relation. There’s only one remedy, in my opinion, though I don’t wish to be understood as advocating it in Lydia’s case, for I’m her closest friend, and she isn’t here to defend herself. But if, as appearances indicate, she has overstepped the limit—though you all admit that the situation was a tremendous one—the only thing which would cut her to the quick would be if the people whose friendship she values were to turn the cold shoulder on her. That’s the only criticism she would really care for,

THE ORCHID

Mr. Ward," she concluded alertly, with her head poised on one side. Mrs. Cole's interest in philosophical discussion was not to be repressed even by her loyalty.

"Ah!" exclaimed the clergyman approvingly. "The force of public opinion! The Church is merely trying to lead public opinion. If public opinion will act of its own accord, so much the better." Mr. Ward, though faithful to his principles, was not averse to let this section of his flock perceive that he welcomed righteousness from whatever source it proceeded, as became a liberal-minded Christian.

"What constitutes public opinion in this country?" asked Gerald Marcy. "One of the evils of universal liberty is that there are no recognized standards of behavior. It is all go-as-you-please."

"Amen," ejaculated the rector.

THE ORCHID

"Consequently," continued Gerald, pursuing the thread of his contemplation, "a social boycott, such as Mrs. Cole suggests, becomes effective only when the particular set to which an offender belongs chooses to take the initiative—which is awkward, for where exactly is one to draw the line?"

"I, for one, feel as though I never wished to speak to her again," said Mrs. Cunningham.

"She certainly deserves to be cut," said her husband, doughtily. Yet he added, "It would be precious hard to manage, though—not to mention inconvenient—if she comes to live at Norrey's Knoll and everything is patched up according to law."

"There you are, you see!" exclaimed Gerald. "I tell you," he said, with a tug at his mustache, "that it's very difficult to cut people whom one has known all one's

THE ORCHID

life, unless they've committed murder or embezzled."

"It isn't as though she were a bigamist or living in—in violation of the seventh commandment," remarked Mrs. Baxter dreamily, remembering just in time to round out her sentence with decorum for the benefit of Mr. Ward.

The rector jumped at the opportunity offered. "Isn't that just what she is doing? It is precisely that from the Church's point of view."

"If the Church would only pass a canon forbidding us to call on women who get divorced in order to marry someone else, it would be easier to take such a stand," remarked Mrs. Cole.

"But it isn't the divorce I mind so much. It's her selling Guendolen," exclaimed Mrs. Cunningham, with the honesty of her tem-

THE ORCHID

perament. "We couldn't ostracize her simply because she has got a divorce and married again, for there are so many others." Her tone showed that she realized the impracticability of a social crusade based solely on the existence in the flesh of a previous wife or husband. Yet she yearned for action in this particular case. But what could one woman do alone?

"On the contrary, it seems to me a grand opportunity, ladies," said the clergyman stoutly. "The conduct of the offending parties in this instance represents individual selfishness and license carried to the culminating point. Because you may have neglected to do your duty in respect to the others is no justification for flinching now. It's the whole degraded system, root and branch, which I am fulminating against; but here we have a concrete, monstrous in-

THE ORCHID

stance which invites action. Is ostracism never to be invoked, as Mr. Marcy intimates, except in the case of the taking of life or where the pocket is affected?"

There was a painful silence. For a wedding reception the discussion was becoming decidedly forensic.

"We must think it over," said Mrs. Cunningham. "If none of us women were to invite her to our houses or go to hers—" She paused without completing her sentence, evidently appalled by the vista of social complications which it opened up.

"There's nothing else in the wide world which Lydia would mind," said Mrs. Cole ruminantly. "But it would break her heart."

"Even a stone can break," Gerald could not refrain from whispering in the speaker's shell-like ear.

"That's not fair. You do not understand her, my friend. She sold Guen to make sure of Harry Spencer." Mrs. Cole answered in the same undertone, "When he is concerned she is a perfect volcano."

"Theoretically," continued the grizzled satirist aloud, with a bow of deference in the direction of the clergyman, "I should like, as a censor of modern social degeneracy, to see it tried, but—but practically it seems to me to be out of the question."

"One woman alone couldn't do it, anyway," blurted out Mrs. Cunningham, in the accents of dogged distress.

Just then the murmurs of a small commotion broke in upon their dialogue, and all eyes were turned in the direction of the front door.

"The bride is going to start, and she has dropped a comb. If she isn't careful, her

THE ORCHID

hair will come down after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Baxter by way of elucidation.

.

One forenoon in the month of July, a year later, the lawn-tennis courts of the Westfield Hunt Club were all occupied. The reason was clear; tennis had become the fashionable sport. Some of the younger spirits, who found golf too gentle a form of exercise, had rebelled successfully against the predominance of that pastime. Consequently all the people of every age who try to do what the rest of the world is doing had consigned their golf clubs to the recesses of their hall closets and bought rackets. Until the present year two courts, both of dirt, had amply supplied the needs of the members; indeed, they had often remained vacant for days at a time. Now even four additional courts failed to meet

current demands, and everybody wished to play on those made of grass, of which there were but two.

On this particular morning these were in the possession of two pairs of women players, who might be said to represent the antipodes of feminine skill at the game. A couple of the younger matrons, Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Miller, both adepts, were engaged in a close, fast contest. Their balls flew low and swiftly, and their long rallies called forth frequent applause from the spectators, chiefly women, sitting on benches along the side lines or on the piazza, as one or the other of the lithe young women, whose restricted, dainty, diaphanous white skirts seemed almost glued to their figures, would pick up the ball when it appeared to be out of reach by dint of a brilliant dash. The other pair

THE ORCHID

of opponents were Miss Marbury, looking stouter than ever in flannels, and Mrs. Gordon Wallace. They were tossing slow, high lobs and getting very warm in the process. They puffed and panted audibly, although the ball struck the net or flew out of bounds much of the time. Yet they had the satisfaction of knowing that they were in fashion; moreover, they had the sanction of their physicians, who advised the exercise as an antidote against corpulency and rheumatism.

Most of the men had gone to the city. Douglas Hale and Gerald Marcy were on one of the dirt courts, and Walter Cole, who was taking his vacation, was playing golf with Kenneth Post. One solitary woman, Mrs. Cunningham, was on the links with her husband. She had demurred stoutly at the contagion of the new fever,

THE ORCHID

and still remained faithful to the fascination of the royal and ancient game. The centre of club life was undeniably the tennis courts, and thither all those who arrived directed their footsteps.

Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Miller having finished three sets, repaired to an isolated bench to enjoy a soda-lemonade and to cool off under the influences of a friendly chat. Mrs. Reynolds, who, as has been intimated, wore the breath of life in her nostrils, had got slightly the better of her adversary, and was inclined therefore to be on the alert, if not perky. Her ears were the first to detect the whir of an automobile, and she pricked them up. Then the toot of a horn fixed everyone's attention on the approaching monster, for automobiles were still more or less of a novelty, and engendered curiosity. In another instant a huge



A huge machine of bridal white . . . tore around the corner.

THE ORCHID

machine, of bridal white, as Mrs. Baxter subsequently described it, tore around the corner of the road, and, dashing past the occupants of the tennis courts, swept up to the ladies' entrance of the club-house, where it paused, snorting like a huge dragon. It was the largest and most imposing "bubble" which Westfield had gazed upon. Many of the spectators left their places to examine it, and everyone's head was turned in that direction.

"It is they!" said Mrs. Reynolds with emphasis; then, after a pause, she asked: "Are you going to-morrow afternoon?"

"I suppose so. As it was a 'request the pleasure,' I had to answer, and we didn't have an engagement. Besides, she has brought home some lovely new tapestries, and we are asked to meet an Eastern sooth-sayer, who is said to be a marvel at mind-

THE ORCHID

reading. Mrs. Charles Haviland and half a dozen women, who are supposed to be fastidious, are coming from town, so my husband seemed to think we had better go."

"It's because she's artistic that she is forgiven, so my husband says, and of course if everyone else is going to 'Norrey's Knoll' there is no sense in our turning up our noses at the new master and mistress."

"Is Mrs. Cunningham going?" asked Mrs. Miller.

"I hear that Dick Weston has bet Mr. Douglas Hale fifty dollars to twenty-five that she does."

"I suppose Lydia and her husband have come to lunch and play bridge," said Mrs. Miller musingly. "They say she plays wonderfully—almost as well as he does. My husband objects to my playing for money."

THE ORCHID

"So does mine. He says it is bad form—vulgar for women—and that it is bringing American society down to the level of the four Georges. But how about men? I obey him, because I am of the dutiful kind. But how about men?" she reiterated trenchantly.

Mrs. Miller dodged the question. "I should fall in a fit if I lost seventy-five dollars in an afternoon, as some of them do."

"They say one gets used to it. I have made Alfred promise to give me an automobile as an indemnity for refusing to play. I must be in fashion to that extent anyway."

Mrs. Miller laughed. They were now practically alone. The occupants of the tennis courts, both women and men, had drifted toward the club entrance, where

THE ORCHID

they stood admiring the new machine and exchanging greetings with the newly married owners. The Spencers had been in possession of "Norrey's Knoll"—which Herbert Maxwell had sold to Lydia—about three weeks, and on the morrow were to hold an afternoon reception for the latest social novelty, an Eastern sorceress. From where they sat the two young women were able to perceive what was going on, and presumably it was the sight of the grizzled Gerald Marcy bandying persiflage with Mrs. Spencer which furnished the cue to Mrs. Miller's next remark:

"Mr. Marcy says that 'bridge' is essentially a gambling game," she responded a little mournfully, "and that to play it properly one should play for money, if at all."

THE ORCHID

"Mr. Marcy says also, my dears, that there are no recognized standards of behavior in this country. It is all go-as-you-please," said a sardonic voice close behind them. They turned in surprise. So absorbed had they been in their dialogue and in watching the arrival of the Spencers that they had failed to notice the approach of Mrs. Andrew Cunningham.

"And he is right," continued that lady, tossing her golf clubs on the grass with a somewhat dejected air. "I am going to surrender."

Thereupon she accepted the space which the others made for her on the bench, and folding her arms turned her gaze in the direction of the white monster and its satellites. The elder matron vouchsafed no immediate key to the riddle she had just enunciated. Mrs. Reynolds

THE ORCHID

stooped, and picking up the bag of golf clubs examined them with an air of one who scans ancient, fusty relics.

"I can't imagine," she said, "how you can keep on playing golf now that everyone is crazy about tennis."

Mrs. Cunningham smiled wanly. "That's what I meant," she answered. "I'm going to begin tennis to-morrow—and I'm also going to Lydia Spencer's reception. My spirit of opposition is broken."

"Yes," continued the mother of the hunt, in an apostrophizing tone, as though she still felt herself on the defensive, "every one is going, and most of the nice people are coming from town. So why should I be stuffy and bite my own nose off? Which goes far to prove, my dears," she added, sententiously, "that the only unpardonable

THE ORCHID

social sin in this country is to lose one's money. Nothing else really counts."

"Oh!" exclaimed the two young women together with animation, as each reflected that Dick Weston had won his bet.

BOOKS BY ROBERT GRANT

"As an observer of American men and women and things Judge Grant is without a rival."—*The Critic*.

"He has proved himself a domestic and social philosopher, happily commingling sharp vision with a good deal of rational philosophy touching practical matters and every-day relationships."—*The Outlook*.

The Undercurrent

Illustrated by F. C. Yohn. 12mo. \$1.50

"First of all a novel, and an excellent one."

—*Review of Reviews*.

"It is a novel in that it has a simple and sympathetic romance for a basis; it is a great novel in that it presents each typical phase of modern life as a master would paint it, seizing the supreme moment and interpreting its significance."—*New York Sun*.

"Into it has gone so much thought, so much keen observation, so much ripe reflection, that one lays it down with a feeling of respect amounting almost to reverence for the man who has brought to the complicated problems of our modern living such earnestness and such ability."—*Interior, Chicago*.

"The discriminating reader cannot fail to find a keen pleasure in the fine literary art which the book displays, as well as the masterly fashion in which the story is developed."—*Brooklyn Eagle*.

BOOKS BY ROBERT GRANT

Search-Light Letters

12mo. \$1.50

"The book has a unique character and flavor that ought to make it pleasant to the little company of faithful lovers of the English essay."—*The Churchman*.

"Mr. Robert Grant is one of our brightest and wittiest writers, and he tells whatever he has to say in so graceful, happy, and amusing a fashion that everything he writes is thoroughly enjoyable."—*Boston Herald*.

"Judge Grant has a keen eye for human weakness, but he looks with Emersonian benignity upon frailties, and he is not without the philosopher's optimistic note of hope."—*Chicago Tribune*.

The Art of Living

12mo. \$1.50

"Mr. Grant's style is easy and lively, his views of life are sound, his humor is pleasing, his wit keen. His book is as good an example of the art of writing as of the art of living."—*The Independent*.

"We have never read a page of his writing of which he should be ashamed, either as a true gentleman or an unusually deft and clever weaver of the wholesome English language."—*The Critic*.

"Crisp and delightful essays. The book is excellent and valuable in every sense of the word."

—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

BOOKS BY ROBERT GRANT

Unleavened Bread

12mo. \$1.50

"No American writer for many years has wrought out a work of fiction so full of meaning, so admirable in its literary quality, and so large and comprehensive as this book of Mr. Grant's."—*The Bookman*.

"The author has elaborated with perfect and convincing clearness a subtle problem in social evolution. And yet he gets into no intricate and fine-spun webs of theory. He sums up the whole case with judicial fairness and gives the devil his dues. The satire in it springs from abundant knowledge of actual social conditions. It is cutting, but it is not flippant or cynical. The book is written in dead earnest."—*Life*.

"In depicting Selma Mr. Grant has produced a work of art so symmetrical and sincere that it deserves also to be called a work of science."—*London Academy*.

"It would be difficult to find a modern novel cleverer than 'Unleavened Bread.' It is impossible within the narrow limits of a short paragraph to give any idea of the extreme cleverness with which Selma's character is drawn. An interesting study of American life, with a subtly painted portrait of a delicate and virtuous female Pecksniff. The book is a great deal more than readable."—*London Spectator*.

"A very remarkable novel, rich in ideas, strong in high appeal, of great interest to all students of life and character, and, especially, to every American who loves his country and desires the best things for her."

—*Boston Advertiser*.

BOOKS BY ROBERT GRANT

The Bachelor's Christmas

Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50

"Mr. Grant's short stories are models in their way. He always writes well and simply, with no affectations and with much humor."—*New York Times*.

"Clever and interesting. Mr. Grant has a happy turn of words, with much appreciation of humor."

—*Philadelphia Public Ledger*.

"A most agreeable volume."—*New York Sun*.

"Mr. Grant's humor is kindly, loving, pure, innocent."—*New York Tribune*.

Reflections of a Married Man

16mo. \$1.25

"A quiet and extremely pleasant social satire."

—*Providence Journal*.

"Writers of renown have drawn many true and vivid pictures of different phases of American life, but none has succeeded in presenting anything more typically American than that which is given us in this small book."—*Chicago Evening Post*.

THE Opinions of a Philosopher

16mo. \$1.25

"He at least is a laughing philosopher, and discusses the ups and downs of married and business and social life with a hopeful spirit. He is amusing and ranges from lively to severe in his running commentary."

—*Springfield (Mass.) Republican*.

"The book is altogether a delightful one and its freshness and sincerity are beyond all praise."

—*Charleston (S. C.) News and Courier*.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK

